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1. Fiction, Canadian.

Macbeth

THE WINNING GAME

By

MADGE MACBETH

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To
MY MOTHER

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The Winning Game

CHAPTER I.

Algy Tressidar boasted that there had only been one great desire in his life, ungratified.

His explanation of this enviable state was not very satisfactory, though it was, to himself, all sufficient. He was not keenly introspective.

It may have been that he never really wanted many things; it may have been that he possessed the dogged persistence and force of will which wrest from life those things which seem worth while; it may have been a bit of both. At any rate, whatever Tressidar set his mind upon he got —be it a horse, a woman, or whisky.

Gambling was by way of mild excitement—mild, because he never seemed to put his whole soul into anything; he was what might be termed casual. Yet Tressidar did experience a sort of thrill, a pleasure in his companions' acknowledgment of his ability to triumph, he rather enjoyed hearing them say:

"I had a streak of Tressidar's luck last night," which meant good luck.

He was generally careless with his victory, often wondering why he tried to win; in fact, Tressidar was only happy in the struggle.

When he lost, however, he did not mind in the least, never having known the grinding, gnawing worry of having no funds at his command. There always seemed to be an uncle, an aunt, or even a fortunate gamble just at the crucial moment. In sports he excelled, being unlike many of his countrymen—mentally alert, and quick to see where advantage might be taken of his opponent's weakness. Always defensive, conservative, he spent his antagonist without playing the game to any extent himself. As in gambling, he did not mind losing, for in that event the honey of triumph was gently plucked from the winner, and the balm of sympathy given to Algy; the victor was always made to feel as though he should have lost.

Yet what he did he did well, saying that he never worried about a piece of work after giving it his attention—it was done as well as it could be done.

Like the sacred oracle at Delphi, circumstances usually worked to his advantage, no matter which way they fell.

With women he was certainly an epicure. Just "women" did not satisfy him; there must be a very particular woman, one sought and coveted by other men, who, perchance, had infinitely more claim to her favors than Tressidar.

No one knew whether he realized this or not, he always laughed with tolerant amusement when his companions ironically sang:

"They say that the best is none too good for Algy."

He had a dangerous intuitive power, being able to discover where the woman found her suitors lacking; he saw the difference between them and the men they were asked to be—he, himself, supplied that difference, and won.

The deadliest weapon of which he was possessed was a politely aloof and indifferent manner. If he cultivated this, no one was the wiser. But he was never seen in any excess of enthusiasm, over anything whatever, and when that attitude is not a pose it tells.

A man of that stamp, to whom things material come too easily, is dangerous in any community, especially in the Indian Hills, where husbands and brothers are sent off to duty and death, leaving wives and sisters, homesickness and heartache, behind.

Whisky? Yes, Tressidar really wanted whisky, but he always got it. He did not take a drink—*he drank*—drank, as men do in India, first, and all their lives after. And when he was "drinking" he had thought for neither God nor man, merely for more, more, more!

But when he was not drinking his mind had to be stimulated, and he turned to women; he grew to love being loved, to look for it, to expect it, be-

cause he was affectionate, in his lazy way. Many a woman who did not understand the potent call of drink, wondered why he left her without a word of farewell, an excuse, or even a regret, having felt only a week before that she was justified, in believing him sincere in his loving.

It always happened that the woman appeared to interest herself in Algy first, for he played the game of love as he did tennis—defensively. He made himself necessary by the process of elimination, so to speak; he always had the appearance of being sought. The woman in the case seldom realized how hopelessly entangled she was in the toils of her own weaving, until Algy left her, a prey to burning thirst, and commenced to drink, forgetting her as completely as though she had never been, and turning up six months later a thousand miles away with the most essential of his belongings tagged, and a mild curiosity as to how it all happened.

Perforce he was something of a traveller, and learned to know women fatally well.

On arriving at a place, the humor of the situation would sometimes strike him. He would try to decide whether to search for companions with whom to while away the nocturnal hours, in a truly Bacchanalian manner, or whether to put himself in the public—that is to say, the feminine eye—and engage once again in gallant pleasantries. Not that Tressidar consciously thought out his course of action so minutely; as has been said, he was not analytical, but he would often toss up a coin carelessly—heads,

a woman; tails, Scotch. Of course, Scotch always won in the long run.

But the one desire—that was twenty years ago, when Algy had come to New York with his brother and that brother's tutor. He was but ten, a willful, spoiled child, whose wish was law at home—Lady Tressidar did not believe in crossing children, she said it spoiled their dispositions, and Sir Anthony—Ah! well, he had troubles of his own, there was Lady T.

At the hotel in New York there was a flaxen-haired elf of a child, younger by several years than Algy, and while he rather scorned the idea of playing with girls, somehow this child interested him, and he had to acknowledge shamefacedly that he liked her.

She did everything as well or better than he; could throw a ball as straight and hard as any boy, could climb and run faster than the lazy English fellow. But she would not suffer him to be a bully, she would not be a nice, terrified, obedient white man, while Algy brandished his tomahawk and roughly dragged at her mop of flaxen hair. In fact, one day, in a fine show of temper, she soundly slapped him and fearlessly walked away from him to the door of her room, while he, astonished to the point of stupidity, stood motionless, listening to the key grating in the lock.

Whatever the offense was, it apparently rankled deep in the little girl's heart, for she refused to meet

Algy again, and so two days went by, bringing the hour of his departure sickeningly near.

At first he had tried to persuade himself that he did not care whether she came out and played or not, but the other children seemed stupid and tiresome in comparison, and finally he confessed that he wanted her. Then he satisfied himself with the assurance that she, too, would be lonely for him, and would come. When she did not, however, he began to want her, want her far more than he had longed for his pony, his gun, his watch, or even his precious jackknife. He rapped on her door, then he pounded, then kicked.

"I want the girl to come out!" he shouted to the maid who opened it; "I want to say good-bye," he added, a little more politely.

The maid spoke quietly over her shoulder, gently, coaxingly, then finally turned back to the boy and shook her head.

"She says she doesn't like you any more, and she won't come out."

Quite suddenly the knowledge burst upon him, bitterly; it was true, she did not like him, she would not come out even to say good-bye!

A blinding rage gripped him, mingled with a perfect passion of longing, and, jumping wildly up and down, he yelled furiously:

"If she won't come drag her—*drag her to me!* I *will* have her! Drag her, I say!"

But it was he who got cruelly dragged away.

CHAPTER II.

"I have something for you, Leslie," said Don Crowley, as his sister Margaret, and Miss Loring came into the drawing-room.

"Oh, Don, you old dear," cried the girl, "did you really get me one? With a lovely flat, black nose and spikey teeth that stick up—this way—on the outside?"

Crowley laughed, and the continuation of his uncontrolled mirth gave Leslie's enthusiasm time to cool. Her eager look was superseded by one of perplexity.

"What is it, then?" she asked, with a pretty pout. "I thought you had discovered my dream dog."

Crowley turned to his sister. "I gather that you have not 'paved the way' in your usual, tactful style, Margaret. Leslie was here to lunch, wasn't she?"

Margaret nodded.

"And it is now seven o'clock," continued her brother, looking at his watch. "If you haven't mentioned the latest item of interest, pray what have you talked about these long, rainy hours?"

"What is it, Don? Don't tease!" Leslie cried impatiently.

Margaret Crowley answered the question in her business-like, matter-of-fact way.

"We have been talking Social Economy, I believe, for the most part, though some of the time Leslie was telling me about her new clothes, too," she added, a prey to accuracy of detail, which is entirely superfluous in a woman.

"Don"—Leslie stamped her foot—"*what?*"

"He is an Englishman," laughed Crowley, "who has *not* a flat, black nose, nor spikey teeth which stick up on the outside—so." He made two tusks of his forefingers and placed them, tip upward, beside his nose.

Margaret exclaimed, and her friend said "Pouf," in disgust. "Is *that* all?"

"He is coming to dine to-night—should be here now, with George Burnley and Vera Stearns. Didn't you tell Les, when I 'phoned?" he asked, turning to his sister.

"No, I forgot by the time I got upstairs," Margaret admitted. "It didn't matter really, you know, and we were so interested in our conversation. She knew she was to stay to dinner and had a gown here, it made no difference who was coming!"

"No apologies necessary," Don assured his sister, with exaggerated kindness, "I was only asking to satisfy a very mild form of curiosity. By the way, have *you* none?" he asked of Leslie, who was standing on tiptoe, trying to catch a refractory lock and pin it under her braid.

The girl shook her head emphatically. "Not a bit! It sounds uninteresting so far—forgive me if I seem to tread, but you remember the last one—er—

what was his name—Haslett or Has-been or Should-have-been-let, or something? A younger son, and all that. Never again!"

Don assumed an injured expression:

"It isn't like you to be governed by a prejudice, Leslie. This one is not Haslett's style in the least. I believe he *is* a younger son, but don't blame him for that; no doubt he would have been the eldest, had he been asked anything about it. If I remember aright, your particular grievance in *Puh-cy's* case was that when he proposed to you he said he knew he was not good enough for you, and all that sort of rot. I doubt that Tressidar will make such a *faux pas.*"

Miss Loring laughed, and her eyes twinkled.

"What a deep and subtle compliment! That was most elegantly done." She puckered her brows for an instant, "Tressidar, did you say?"

"Yes—Algernon Tressidar."

"And an Englishman? Tressidar!" She repeated the name, thoughtfully—"Algy Tressidar."

"Humph," commented Don, "how chummy! Algy, indeed!" He turned to an imaginary person at his side and simpered, "Well, do you know, I feel as though I had known you all my life—we are so thoroughly congenial!"

Before Leslie could answer Mrs. Stearns and Burnley entered, and Margaret, with a housekeeper's pride in her table, looked at the clock, a shade of annoyance crossing her face as the half hour chimed.

Mrs. Crowley never left her room. Many of her

friends scoffed at her inability to do so, and hinted that she stayed there just to prove them in the wrong. Nevertheless, the burden of housekeeping had been Margaret's ever since her eighteenth birthday, and that experience combined with natural common sense, made her home a pleasure to her brother and his friends.

"George tells me that Mr. Matheson is not so well to-night," Vera was saying, with anxiety. "I wish he would let some of us do something. Have you seen him, Don?" she asked, turning to their host.

"Yes, this afternoon. Poor old boy, he was rather bad, fighting for his breath and only able to whisper. When I leaned over the bed, he said, 'The doctor calls it pneumonia, but I call it Hell!' Doesn't that sound like him?"

Leslie's eyes filled with tears, and she clasped her hands, tightly, together.

"He simply *must* get better," she said, "he must! What would we do without him?"

Burnley spoke.

"The club would never be the same to me, I know, if Matheson were not there. Though so much older than the rest of us, he is beyond all odds the greatest favorite, and, as he says, 'the youngest boy there.' He now feels particularly blue because, on account of his illness, he is unable to do the proper thing by Tressidar."

At the mention of that name, Margaret Crowley looked at the mantel and frowned again. The

hands pointed to the quarter. To her conventional mind, this was a crime—being late for dinner and at a stranger's home.

"What has he to do with Mr. Tressidar?" asked Leslie, showing her interest for the first time.

"He had letters to Matheson," explained Burnley, "or *a* letter from his eldest brother, who was a friend and schoolmate of his, I believe."

"Yes," Crowley interrupted, "the old chap's hospitable spirit writhes, because he has to depend on us to do the honors. He has only seen Tressidar once."

"Bless him," murmured Leslie, a little unsteadily.

"Margaret," ventured Mrs. Stearns, "did your *raison d'etre* know at what hour the Crowley's dine? I don't wish to seem impatient, or unduly gluttonous, but the hideous truth is—that I am both. I am dieting now, you know, and only eat a cheese straw or two in the middle of the day."

While the others laughed, Margaret blushed an uncomfortable red. She knew Vera's speech was intended to be funny and recognized its tact in turning the conversation from a subject so distressing to Leslie, but at the same time she was sensitive to a fancied rebuke in opening her doors to one so grossly ignorant of his privilege, and she turned a little sharply to her brother.

"Did you tell Mr. Tressidar that we dine at half-past seven, Don?"

But Crowley had already moved toward the door

and was accepting the somewhat careless apologies of his latest guest.

Though "careless" is hardly expressive. In thinking about it later, Leslie was rather at a loss to find a correct and applicable adjective, descriptive of Tressidar's manner. He came slowly into the room with a grace and ease which appealed to her, at once, yet she resented an absence of contrition, penitence, at his tardy appearance.

The words, and even the tone of his voice, were scrupulously correct, but there was that lacking, in both, for which Margaret Crowley and her friend looked.

"I am awfully sorry to be so late," Tressidar said, in a pleasant, low English voice. "I was detained."

That was all.

In itself it was sufficient—verbosity, gushing, tells against a person, but Leslie felt somehow that Tressidar himself attached no importance to the occurrence, and she resented it.

"My sister, Margaret," Don said, "and Mrs. Stearns, may I introduce our guest? Miss Loring —and Burnley you already know."

After shaking hands with Burnley, the Englishman turned back for a moment toward Leslie, who had moved to her favorite place beside the mantel. He looked at her curiously, and seemed about to address her, reconsidered it, and walked to the divan, beside Vera Stearns.

Leslie, always keenly alive to "situations," al-

most laughed outright, as a little Pussy-in-the-corner game took place. Burnley left his seat, and moved to Margaret, while Don asked her to look at a new piece of tapestry at the far end of the room.

As they passed the divan, Vera was saying:

"Speak quickly, while I strangle a platitude—I was just about to ask 'How do you like New York?' "

Tressidar laughed and kept his eyes on her face as though oblivious to any one else in the room.

"Well?" asked Don, when out of earshot.

Leslie's eyes twinkled wickedly, "I——" she began.

"Dinner, Miss Crowley," announced the faithful Watkins solemnly.

CHAPTER III.

In spite of expert attendance, material comfort, and the earnest prayers of more friends than many of us are vouchsafed in this vale of competition and tears, Albert Matheson, bachelor, passed to his eternal rest, the day following the Crowley's dinner.

At noon, the nurse bent tenderly over him, asking if there was not some one he would like to see, and in answer to the startled inquiry in his eyes, two scalding tears ran down her cheeks.

Don and Leslie reached the apartment almost simultaneously. They were both calm and could be depended upon.

"I have nothing to say," gasped Mr. Matheson, trying to smile, "and am not going to give away my family jewels nor the pianola. I simply wanted to see you both—that's all."

The two sat on the edge of his bed, vainly trying to suppress the look of suffering they knew was in their eyes.

"I am so glad you let us come, dear," whispered Leslie. "If you only *knew* how we have missed you."

"That's good news, to an old duffer like me," the sick man wheezed. "You two have always

been my little world, since Kitty——"

He ceased speaking, and a spasm contracted his features. Don put his arm about Leslie, carrying her, protesting, from the room, and left her for a moment in the den.

When he returned she was staring at the photograph of her mother which Matheson always kept above the mantel.

"I am going to take you home with me, dear," he said tenderly, "Margaret won't disturb you."

She did not answer then, but outside in the hansom she asked to go to her own home, for a while, at least, and Crowley did not insist upon having his way.

Leslie Loring was an orphan, and lived alone. Hers was one of those unfortunate and peculiar cases, where both of her parents were only children, and she was their only child. Captain Loring, a gay young naval officer, after a year's absence from his wife, contracted a malignant fever on his homeward cruise, and never saw his baby.

Kitty Loring, inconsolable at first, gradually decided to gather together the broken threads of her young life, and after three years of widowhood, married an officer in the Indian army, much to Albert Matheson's sorrow and misgiving. She took her little girl out to the colony with her, alike ignorant and distrustful of the stories told concerning climatic conditions, for the infatuated Colonel Ashbury, fearing lest the child should stand in his way, encouraged her to take Leslie.

After two years of incessant struggling to keep the baby alive, Kitty Ashbury, divided between her love for her husband and daughter, decided to send the latter home, and to make a trip at least once a year to see the child. She herself was far from strong, and at times a sickening dread of enteric fever took firm hold of her, and worked sad havoc with her nerves.

The gigantic problem confronting her, however, was what to do with Leslie, after she reached New York. Having no near relations, and under the circumstances not caring to ask old Madam Loring to take the little girl, this question caused Kitty many restless nights. She finally decided to send her maid and companion—a woman whose fidelity and devotion were assured—with her little charge to Edgeville, a small hamlet well off the beaten track, where all the inhabitants were, in a measure, as one large family, and where under Mrs. Edge's care Leslie could recover her lost vitality and strength.

After this was accomplished there would be time to think of the next move.

Mrs. Edge was several years older than Kitty Ashbury, but before her marriage, had been rather an intimate friend. She was the phlegmatic sort of woman who settles herself comfortably down and never changes anything, taking color from the tone predominant. What every one else did, Sophie Edge did, too; the way others lived, she lived also, and the position of the furniture re-

mained the same, from the day she moved into her house until the end of the chapter. Never very inventive nor initiative, even in New York, after living six months in Edgeville, every vestige of individuality was sapped, and she drawled as lazily, and dropped her g's, as naturally as did Mrs. Joshua Clapham, wife of the Reverend Rector.

Ezra Edge was land poor—he owned most of the village which bore his name, but little good it did him, when no one else succumbed to an inherent longing to possess a patch of Edgeville, or when those who did, paid their obligation on the good old system of tithes, with precious little of ready currency attached.

As Edgeville's daughters grew and the age of indiscretion and discontent in their rural surroundings, they flitted to city relations and more congenial atmosphere which excursions generally culminated in a modest gift to the Rev. Mr. Clapham and unctuous farewells. They sometimes returned that Edgeville might gaze with envy and wonder on the first born, but while the community at large, appreciated this honor and privilege, and Ezra Edge shared the sensation of pride in a more or less limited degree, it did nothing toward filling the family coffers, and he saw his dream of building up a thriving metropolis, fade slowly away.

When Leslie Loring, accompanied by the faithful Ceciley, arrived for an indefinite stay in the Edge household, her advent did not make the stir it might have done, had she not timed her visit

simultaneously with that of the stork, who laid in Sophia Edge's waiting arms, a chubby young son. Kitty Ashbury knew nothing of this or it might have made some difference in her plans, though the length of time required for a letter to reach Mizrapore, and the answer to find its way to Edgeville, was so great, that the news would have been stale when half the journey was completed.

So Leslie and Ceciley settled down, as much as Leslie could settle, and several monotonous years rolled on.

She saw her mother but once. Kitty made the trip almost—yes, almost—reluctantly. She had grown to love the life in India, and she cared quite seriously for her husband. The regular reports from Ceciley were more than satisfactory, and it seemed as though Leslie grew less and less a part of her. It was more than apparent that the child had outgrown the need of her mother.

So each year the trip was postponed, until at last the deadly enteric fever did its work, and Mrs. Ashbury, the most popular woman at the post, was taken upon that Long Journey, from which she could not return.

Her death meant little to Leslie—there was always Ceciley. Henrietta Edge was flatteringly pliable and plastic, very like her mother, a nice child to mould into one's idea of the ideal playmate; then, too, there was Tom, several years her junior, but still a happy relaxation after some hours spent in Henrietta's company, so Leslie Loring found

ample work of its kind for her restless mind, and did not miss something she had never known in the loss of her mother.

When the time came for selecting a school outside the limited radius of Edgeville's idea of education, the girl assumed the whole responsibility of the choice herself, arguing that she was the one to be pleased, and that if *she* chose it and was disappointed, no one would ever know—if they chose a school, unwisely—"well you know my disposition," Leslie said, with a dark and sinister shake of her yellow head.

She read over the circulars and discussed the advantages and disadvantages of each with her elders showing such intelligence, that finally Mr. Edge said:

"Well, Sophie, let the child go where she pleases. I feel that she is much like my old horse, Molly—give her the reins and allow her to go ahead, she will keep to the middle of the road and safety. Try to guide her and make a path for her—she will pull against you and probably land you in a ditch. Horses and some women have sense."

Sophie Edge placidly acquiesced. Her friends said she had a beautiful faith in Providence. Those who were not so charitably inclined, said she was lazy. However, in this instance the result would have been the same.

Leslie chose a very select school, where there was listed among many extras and little stars, the amount required for a maid's comfort and suste-

nance, though when asked why she showed a partiality for that seminary above all others, Leslie had answered thoughtfully, as if unprejudiced by the obvious elegance and high standing:

"Well, you see, Zee-Zee," (her name for Mr. Edge) "at Madame's they appear to *expect* a great deal of you. I like having a great deal expected of me, for I can do just that much. When nothing is expected of me"—she unconsciously glanced in Henrietta's direction—"I do nothing, that is, until I simply can't stand it—then I do something dreadful."

Ezra Edge laughed indulgently. Leslie's "dreadful things" always reflected upon herself alone—her sense of honor was so great that she never allowed Tom or Henrietta to share her disgrace, but neither did they share her glory in the speechless admiration of the few children with whom she elected to play, while committing these deeds of reckless disobedience and palpable danger. *She* was always the nimble creature of fancy, swinging perilously from a rafter in the barn—the others imploring her, in shrieks of terror, to return to the safe, if prosaic foundation of the floor beside them; it was Leslie, who sprinkled herself with a thin coating of straw and stood transfixed with rapture at her own courage while she set herself alight—the noble Joan d'Arc could not have known a moment of greater or more intense glorification.

The genuine agony of Tom, Henrietta, and the other children, abandoning their priestly and mob-

bish rôles to quench the flames, only added joy to her dramatic temperament; it was always Leslie who led, and the others who obediently followed.

If she urged them into mischief she also exonerated them from all blame and took what punishment was meted out to her, with Spartan courage and Stoic indifference.

Had the Edges wished to curb these flights of fancy and their oftimes disastrous results, they should have punished the others, and let Leslie go free. But parents and guardians usually have a poor perspective and need the children or charges themselves, to show them the way.

Sometimes in desperation she would ask:

"Henny, what shall we do?" or, "Tom, can't you suggest something really thrilling?" but invariably with the same result—that of having to do all the planning and organizing herself.

What wonder that she was spoiled—or was she spoiled? Is a child spoiled who always has her own way? Yes? But why, if her way is better than that of her associates? Who could assert that Sophie Edge was a better guide for Leslie than Leslie, herself? If the credit of the child's upbringing was due to any one it was due to Ceciley, though that faithful soul often averred that "Miss Leslie was one of those children who is born brought up, and educated!"

CHAPTER IV.

At fifteen, with only such schooling as could be had in Edgeville, a settlement of old maids and miasma, Leslie Loring entered Madame Bagneau's Finishing School. No one, not even vigilant Cecily, knew the nights of agony and self-discipline the child lived through, preparatory to leaving the little realm where she had reigned supreme.

For, naturally analytical, the girl was more, she was clever enough to realize her own short-comings and limitations.

"Of course," she said to herself, over and over again, with a perfectly gigantic amount of self-confidence, "I can pretend that I know a lot more than I do, and make them believe it, too, though they are not as stupid as Miss Carson—or Lew Higgins," she added with a contemptuous little laugh, which would have upset that gentleman's digestive organs greatly, he being a prey to nervous dyspepsia, only warded off by great care, and the general homage and consideration of the public. "But the question is, do I want to? I am going to be clever! Isn't it better to be a little more ignorant even now, and be really sure of things afterward, than to have a"—she hesitated for a word suffi-

ciently lofty—"superficial knowledge both now and ever afterward? Heavens, if these geese here only knew the truth—how often I am stumped for answers, and the way to get information for them, they would laugh! I often remind myself of Lew Higgins who was never known to say, 'I don't know!' Who could learn anything at school here?" she asked herself a little bitterly. "I know all the questions they ask me from the books, and they don't know the ones I ask, and I have nowhere to find them. Oh, what joy to have some one to answer things!

"I don't know how girls treat each other"—then a little guiltily—"they might look upon me as I do Henrietta, and I could not *bear* that! Of course, it would only be at first they would dare, for after I am told what to learn, I can do it faster and better than they, most likely," she thought.

Too proud to discuss the matter with Ceciley, for fear of revealing her lack of self-confidence, Leslie sometimes for the sheer satisfaction of testing her strength, spoke of her change of conditions to Henrietta and Tom.

"You will have to wear your best things every day, mama says," announced the former with a mixture of awe and commiseration—"that is the way city people live."

"Say, Les, what would you do, if you couldn't learn their way?" asked Tom, more to tease than for information. The question was answered by a withering, contemptuous look.

It was characteristic of Leslie that she did not waste a moment's thought upon the possibility of being unable to do what was required of her—her source of anxiety lay in the uncertainty of how she would be received—liked, in other words.

Supersensitive, high-strung, and more than ordinarily affectionate, a cold, critical reception by the girls would have imperilled her happiness for months. She realized how dependent she had become upon the affection of these country children —their whole-souled "our-queen-can-do-no-wrong" attitude, and knew she would miss it. The feminine was potent enough to call for purple raiment and hand embroidered linen, but Ceciley attended to most of her shopping, entirely by catalogue, still even catalogue clothes, if selected judicially, have a certain "air," and Leslie never felt that she looked in any way like a country girl; she was very particular about her dress, always feeling its influence unconsciously confirming the family dictum—"Fine feathers make fine birds."

No, nothing disturbed her as much as the worrying thought that she had to make good before a more critical audience than she had ever known. To some people the knowledge of a conflict brings out much latent power, and they marshall all their forces to meet the emergency. Leslie was more like a sensitive plant, thriving, blossoming, bringing forth it's loveliest and best, at the gardner's gentle touch, at the sun's affectionate warmth. She knew that if her reception were a cold one she could

not fight to win the love and esteem of the girls—if they gave it at first, well, she was quite sure of holding it.

However, Madame's Select Academy opened welcoming arms to Leslie, her three trunks and maid.

Several of the young ladies had maids, and incidentally Ceciley began to receive her education, quite free of charge. Current ideas in dress, the fashions of the day, etc., were made the foundation of her curriculum; extravagances which she had long since forgotten returned with startling vividness and ease of performance (Kitty Loring had been noted for her extravagant absurdities); and now Leslie, under Madame's tutelage, bid fair to eclipse her mother. Little luxuries were added every week to the expense list, such as perfumed powder for the bath, incense burned under the excuse of fumigation, an appalling amount of toilet accessories, until even Albert Matheson, whom Mrs. Ashbury had appointed guardian and trustee of Leslie and her affairs, looked with curiosity and wonderment at the bills.

During the years spent in Edgeville the Loring interests had thriven, and, save for overwhelming surprise that such a leap from self-enforced penury to Florentine extravagance was accomplished, in so short a time, there was no murmur from Leslie's guardian.

For a few years, some of which were spent under the tutelage of Madame—and her pupils—and some spent roaming this continent and several others,

there was urgent need of all the funds in trust for Miss Loring. Then at twenty-one something of the restlessness subsided and she announced her intention of living *a la* bachelor maid, in a New York apartment. Mr. Matheson was filled with guardianly consternation—he had seen comparatively little of his ward, and looked upon her as a young lady of particularly unique and lawless whims. She denied being too young, saying that age is not a matter of years, but of wisdom and experience.

Edgeville was indignant and sniffed. It is permissible to sniff in Edgeville, the fashion having been set by the Reverend Mrs. Clapham herself, who had her own peculiar contemptuous lifting of the nostrils, accompanied by a short and salient hiss; but Leslie, impervious to protests and sniffs, signed a long lease and "settled." She had made many friends during her school days, and several more while travelling, besides New York is every one's Mecca, and to be the centre of things was breath in the nostrils of Leslie Loring.

With Ceciley as a combination lady's maid and duenna, and with an excellent and devoted English girl for everything else, the domestic arrangement of the menage did not cause its mistress great uneasiness, and she had ample time for such dissipation as her fancy dictated.

Yet, withal, Leslie's life was not empty by any means. Association with Margaret Crowley acted as a splendid ballast, if she really stood in need of it. There were slumming clubs, real working orga-

nizations, doing much good to the toil-hardened, crime-burdened creatures of the tenements; there was a cooking class, and a Reading club, sewing school and the newsboys' club, all of which appealed to the young girl, and to which she devoted her best energies enthusiastically in turn.

Many times she was cruelly imposed upon, allowing herself to be persuaded that it was her duty to do more work then the other members because she had no home ties or inconveniences. She was never idle, for when not actually engaged in some sort of work, she was diligently reading. In other words, Leslie "developed."

She, herself, felt it, and radiated that knowledge in a startling degree, when on the night of her twenty-first birthday Albert Matheson, looking at her with different eyes, rose from the dinner table, and proposed a toast in these words:

"To the youngest sage on record, to the most complex female it has yet been granted us to know, to the combination of iridescent wit, and angelic gentleness, to the queen of our hearts and the goddess of our reason—LESLIE!"

CHAPTER V.

Sitting listlessly in her room, just as Don had left her, Leslie lived over these years bit by bit, with an acute sense of loneliness which grew momentarily stronger. As is so often the case, at the time of a sudden shock, she was mercifully dulled to the larger, more vital issues, and only the trivialities occurred to her.

"How queer not to see him at the table on Sundays," she mused, half aloud, "and *what* endless days without a telephone call from him!"

The tones of his voice recurred vividly to her, and two scalding tears splashed on her clasped hands.

"He's dead," she repeated dully, "really dead. I know I shall forget and 'phone him some day. How silly I am! I tell you he is dead!"

Ceciley passed quietly through the room. The woman knew intuitively as a mother would, how to handle the various moods to which her young mistress was prone. In this instance a glance at the dejected figure was sufficient, and instead of asking Leslie to lie down or suggesting a cup of tea, Ceciley went straight to her heart's idol and gently undid her veil. Then she took off the fur toque

and ran her fingers lovingly through Leslie's golden hair.

"Was he very bad, my baby darling?" she asked.

"I don't know," was the vague reply; "I don't know how bad they ever are. He tried to smile and joke—Oh, Ceciley, how dreadful to think he is gone! I can't believe it, can you?"

"Not yet, lamb, not yet."

"And in a couple of weeks think another birthday will be here, and what on earth will the dinner be without him?"

Ceciley did not answer, and the girl went on musingly:

"The first one seems only yesterday, and it was really four long years ago. Don't you remember Ceciley, how much afraid of him I was, and how he seemed to avoid me?"

"Ah, but there was a good reason for that, my darling," interrupted the maid, anxious to take up imaginary cudgels in defense of a man she had long considered a hero, a god among men. "You reminded him of Miss Kitty, in looks, you see, but were so different otherwise he could not get used to you, I think—not until after that first party, wasn't it? Then he really seemed to think of you and Miss Kitty separately, and each of you had her own place."

She paused, secretly pleased at the lucid explanation she had given Leslie of something the girl had already known.

"I wonder why mother did not marry him?" was

Leslie's next thought, spoken aloud, and while the reason was clear enough to herself, Ceciley found it a little harder to explain.

"Perhaps she knew him too well—I mean knew what to expect. You see, Miss Kitty was not as—as brainy as you are, baby darling, she was all for surprises, show, and glitter, and when Colonel Ashbury came to her one evening all dressed up in a scarlet suit just covered with gold braid and tassels, I said to myself the instant I clapped eyes on him—'tis good-bye, forever, to your chances, Mr. Matheson—and so it was."

"But she must have loved him," argued Kitty's daughter, clinging to her point, "for you say that always her first thought in everything was of him."

"Not exactly," corrected the maid. "No, I did not say just that; I said that before any one else she turned to him, even before the colonel, and when she found we would have to leave that poisoned place in India, she even had an idea of sending us right to him—only for the talk it would have made. That was why she put your money in his keeping too—he always did everything in just the way to please her, and she trusted, absolutely, in him."

The telephone rang, and Leslie walked into her little study opening off the living-room to answer it, supposing Don to be calling her.

As she put the receiver to her ear, turning her back to the door, Hattie, the maid, passed along the hallway leading to the front door of the apartment.

She knew nothing of her mistress's distress of mind, and unhesitatingly admitted Mrs. Stearns, who was a frequent visitor, and a gentleman, without the evasive, "I'll see."

Vera, seeing Leslie at the 'phone, signalled Tressidar to tiptoe and sat down patiently, so that for Leslie who sweetly but persistently refused Margaret's urgent request to spend a few days with her, there was no escape.

"I ran in, *sans ceremonie,*" began Vera, in her tense, enthusiastic style, "palpably to ask you to a party, but actually—let this secret be buried with you"—she admonished in a heavy, mysterious whisper, "*actually* to display the prize," waving a neatly gauntleted hand in Tressidar's direction.

Leslie laughed a little. It was hard not to laugh at Vera, and, anyway, the mention of her grief would be quite out of place, at this time; at best Tressidar could only evince a polite interest in her guardian, and so she decided with characteristic rapidity, to get through the visit as cheerfully as possible, and let Vera find out the sad news for herself, later. Something in the nature of jealousy prompted this secretiveness on the girl's part, jealousy that Albert Matheson's memory be as tenderly handled as she and Don Crowley could wish.

"Well?" Mrs. Stearns interrupted impatiently, while the other two were going through the customary greeting, "have you nothing to say to either proposition?"

"When is the party?" questioned Leslie, with a view to being released.

"Vulgar and material being!" scoffed the widow. "Let me point this out to you, Mr. Tressidar—that she fastens upon these earthly matters in preference to drawing psychic inferences as to our—affinity, shall I say? or such a problem as 'How I bagged the lion.' That doesn't sound exactly right, somehow," she rattled on at high speed, "bagging a lion! No matter, such trivialities do not interest me! The main thing is——"

"Vera"—Leslie's voice had a tired note of appeal in it, which Tressidar noticed, though his companion did not. Vera Stearns was not an observant person. Given an errand of mercy to perform, the angels in heaven could not carry it out more satisfactorily, but she was singularly obtuse about finding an errand, as it were. "Vera," repeated Leslie, "do be rational one moment while I ask Mr. Tressidar to ring for tea. Since I must contradict your invective, in self-defense, I would say that I approached the subject of your late conversation systematically, that is, taking up the first one *first*, and intending, in proper order, to revert to the next. I shall seize this occasion to ask you how you bagged the lion. Is that what you wanted?"

"Viper," laughed Vera. "Shame upon you for an unnatural female, disclosing the foibles of your sex, thusly! I am only 'making conversation,'" she continued, raising a serious face to Tressidar,

"while tea is coming. There is something strangely amiss with me, I fear."

"Yes," Algy said, with polite interest.

"Um-hum," vouched Mrs. Stearns. "The sight of food does not appeal to me—really"—she seemed to contradict an unspoken thought of her hostess—"but the anticipation of it—dear me, the very idea of a cup of tea, *and* some of those delightful biscuits Hattie makes—Oh, here she is! Mr. Tressidar, the smelling salts, quickly! I feel a faintness coming on, Leslie is so exasperatingly deliberate."

"Well, *how* did you bag the lion?" Leslie inquired again, after giving her guests tea.

Mrs. Stearns laughed delightedly, as a child might; a child, who despairing of an opportunity for displaying its best parlor tricks, at last sees an enviable opening.

"Heavens, I was so afraid I wouldn't get the chance," she murmured. "I 'phoned him at the club, Les, darling, and asked him to help me '*wheel* away the afternoon.' He caught the idea nicely, in other words, I am trying Salome this afternoon for the first time in the dogcart, and he soon was *trapped*. Entirely original, miss!"

Leslie laughed appreciatively, and looked at Tressidar over her tea cup. It was impossible not to laugh when in Vera's vicinity. At Madame's, as schoolmates, the two girls had been considered temperamentally identical. So much for the casual observer. But Leslie had all of Vera's vivacity and wit, with something infinitely finer and deeper than

the other could dream of. To the Englishman, making swift comments, spurred by an unusual curiosity, Leslie at that moment far eclipsed her friend in general attractiveness—a fact he had not recognized until now.

Almost instantly, however, the light died out of her eyes, and she gave him the impression of being either bored, or dull, or both. He began to wish that Mrs. Stearns would "wheel" him away—he was not accustomed to see a bored look upon a woman's face.

"I have another piece of news," Vera was saying, "you can never guess who is going to be married."

"You," suggested Leslie.

"Silly," expostulated the little widow, growing foolishly pink. "It is a man."

"Well, of course," teased Leslie, marvelling inwardly at her *sang froid,* and wondering if they would never go. "You could not marry a woman. Who is the lucky person?"

"Cat," snapped the other. "Fancy, Mr. Tressidar, fancy calling my prospective husband a 'person'!"

"A shade better than calling him a 'party,' though," Algy suggested.

"Yes, perhaps. Well, no matter, let it pass. I was referring"—this with exaggerated hauteur—"to Mr. Walter Bryce."

"Walter Bryce!" echoed Leslie.

"The same, my dear." Vera leaned back comfortably, better to watch her friend's astonishment.

"Why, that is"—she began, then remembering Tressidar—"I am simply aghast," she continued, speaking to him directly, for the first time, "because this boy has been a most trying inheritance to his doting aunts, has committed most of the sins on the calendar, and has brought them no end of trouble. The one saving grace was that he had refrained from bringing them an extra worry in the shape of a wife. His two aunts, Miss Libby and Miss Polly, are, of course, to blame, for they never let him lose sight of the fact that he was the very world to them. From this limited point of view his ideas began to assume gigantic proportions, and he finally became assured that the king could do no wrong. Before he had fairly gone through college he had gone also through a very large sum of money, outmillionairing the millionaires themselves in his playful extravagances, and since then he has been too much of a gentleman to work."

She stopped, a little confused.

"Of course you can't sympathize, quite, can you? I believe in your country, that idea is still prevalent —that of a gentleman being exempt from work."

"Under some conditions," Tressidar answered. "From what you have told me, however, it seems only right that this chap should have done something to repay his aunts—in that I quite agree."

Vera spoke. "He never had an idea of doing such a thing, he bleeds them unmercifully, he makes

an asset, with diabolical cleverness, of his dependence upon them, he works on their sympathies and trades upon their love for him, and they—well, they are just geese, that's all," she ended vehemently.

"Yes," murmured Leslie sadly, "doting, loving, blind old geese. They can't see him as he is, and I don't know of any one who would care for the task of enlightening them."

"Very sad, indeed, for them." Algy was quite interested, not in the story of Walter Bryce, that was nothing to him, but in the varying expressions of Leslie's face, so many of the women he knew had long since stifled the ability to show any real feeling, this display of Miss Loring's was a treat. Her face had a familiar——

"Oh, dear, it's time for me to go," Vera interrupted, "when Leslie looks like that she is either getting ready to moralize or she is going to make us all cry. That used to be one of her star tricks at school, Mr. Tressidar, making us cry."

"Re-hally?" asked the Englishman.

"Re-hally!" mimicked Vera. "We used to make bets that she couldn't, but she always could. By the way, Les, you have had me on the verge of tears several times this afternoon; I *felt* something sad, truly I did! Don't tell me that my psychic sense is at fault! *What* was the matter?"

They stood at the door leading into the hallway, and Tressidar held it open for Mrs. Stearns to pass through.

"Humph?" she asked.

A look of pain darkened Leslie's eyes, and her voice had lost something of its steadiness as she answered:

"Don and I were with Mr. Matheson when he died just a little while before you came."

CHAPTER VI.

The club was a dreary place on the following day but one, and Tressidar had half made up his mind to leave New York and journey southward for a month or so, until the members had recovered from the effect of Matheson's death. It was rather a novel experience to Algy—this genuine grief for the loss of a man. He remembered a serious altercation, with his brother a few years past, resulting from a total absence of regret on his part for a lost comrade. Ramsay Tressidar had stood gazing at the photo of a friend whose death should have meant much to both brothers, when Algy entered the room. Seeing him, Ramsay sighed and said, "Poor, dear Cyril!"

The younger man laughed outright, "What maudlin rot," he scoffed. "Poor, dear Cyril, indeed!"

It was a quarrel to be remembered, ending just where it began, Ramsay Tressidar claiming that he was no less a man to show regret and say "poor, dear Cyril," and Algy contending that it was ridiculous sentimentalism, and that he would not be surprised to find a strand of the dead man's hair in his brother's locket.

Something of the same resentment against the

club men now passed over their guest, and he was wondering how to put in the afternoon when an ostentatious young man approached him, and, holding out his hand, asked:

"Tressidar? Ah, I thought so. My name is Bryce—Walter Bryce. What will you drink?" They lighted cigarettes and moved toward the open fire.

"You must find it beastly dull around here today, every one has gone to poor old Matheson's funeral. Awfully good sort—you know. My aunts thought the world of him; in fact, but for him, I should not be here now," the young man ended with a laugh, combining embarrassment and contempt.

Tressidar was bored—Bryce's type did not appeal to him in the slightest degree; the affectation in his manner and dress was irritating, the misplaced *bon camaraderie,* amounting to undue familiarity offended Algy's sensitiveness, and, above all, his loquaciousness repelled him, but here apparently was a willing spirit with whom to drink. A kind of exhilaration took possession of him, a serious form of the craving, about which Vera Stearns had spoken so lightly in reference to her afternoon tea. Although the men whom he had met had not impressed him as being at all narrow-minded or abstemious, still, there was a certain feeling of delicacy, a restraint with them which Algy was quick to note, and so far he had curbed his thirst admirably.

With Walter Bryce, however, all that restraint vanished, and a keen look at his weak face was sufficient guarantee to Tressidar of a thoroughly enjoyable evening.

"But for Matheson, I was saying," Bryce continued over his glass, "I should not have been here now."

"Re-hally?" asked Algy, with flattering interest.

"You see the old girls—my aunts—are just about two centuries behind the times, and they can't understand or sympathize with me"—Walter threw an immense amount of pathos and bitterness into this statement, which was all too true, they never could understand such as he—"you know yourself, Tressidar, if you are a University man, that one has to fall in line, so to speak, and keep the ball rolling in a more or less individual way."

The Englishman nodded appreciatively, and beckoned the steward.

"Why, they would have made a parson out of me, I suppose, if I had allowed it. But coming back to Matheson, he sort of stood sponsor for me here, not that I really needed it, you understand, but they thought a club would be my undoing, I suppose, and Matheson could have kept me out, had he wished. Fancy being treated like a schoolboy! No wonder I break loose once in a while, is it?"

"It would be surprising, otherwise," replied the other with conviction. Walter began to grow more interesting.

Here was a really pretty problem—two conventional maiden ladies, trying to bring up a wayward nephew with horticultural predilictions of the wild oats variety, along such puritanical lines, that the said nephew became quite impossible to handle, and the worse he became the more saintly, narrow, and exacting grew the ladies, hoping, to teach him by precept until—— It was certainly a muddle, which only could be elucidated by another drink.

"He was a very good sort," repeated young Bryce, beginning to feel kindly disposed toward every one, "and will be greatly missed. There's Crowley, for instance, and Burnley, too—know him?—who cared more for him than men of their own age. Matheson was no chicken, remember," he whispered, with a secretive wink, although the two men were alone in the room.

Tressidar nodded darkly. He realized the absurdity of Bryce's conversation and actions, but it did not seem worth while to point this out to him as yet; he had not reached the argumentative point, which always preceded a totally unconscious state.

"Fact!" whispered Bryce. "He was old enough to be my father!"

Six o'clock chimed and Tressidar proposed dinner downtown, then the theatre.

Seated once more over their glasses, Walter, whose mind under these conditions ran for hours along the same line of thought, brought the conversation back to Matheson.

Tressidar was differently constituted. He talked

about deeds of heroism or diplomacy in which *he* had figured largely, jumping from one idea to another with amazing rapidity, and he grew tired of the name Matheson.

"He had nothing particularly to recommend him," he argued. "Give me a man of muscle, a man to whom hardship is nothing. Why, I know the strongest man in London! S' the truth! And how do you suppose he got his muscle? Shimply by drawing up his right arm—so—and believing that his left one would grow as strong, *and it did!*"

Walter was vaguely impressed.

"Feel my muscle, *feel* it," Algy insisted, as they made their way into the crowded lobby of the theatre. "With justht a little practice I could have muscles like that myshelf. I'm ash strong ash a bull," he boasted thickly. "My God, it's hot in here!"

"Well, Matheson was——" began Bryce stubbornly.

"Rot!" snapped the Englishman. "He wash mush—shimply mush! Look at his death, there's a proof—couldn't stand an attack of pneumonia. Look at me. Why, I've had enteric three timesh, and am ash good to-day ash ever."

But Walter was not listening; the scantily clad chorus claimed all his attention, and he applauded with flattering regularity and insistence.

To the casual observer there was nothing in Tressidar's manner or bearing to indicate his condition. He sat upright in the box and looked with easy

indifference at the performance; his black hair lay in glossy waves close to his head, his bronze face was very slightly flushed, and his inscrutable yellow eyes were comparatively clear and wide open, contracted ever so little, at the corners, perhaps.

Walter presented a striking contrast. His fair hair was in a damp, untidy mat on his forehead, and with every sweep of his hand to smooth away an imaginary look, he made wild havoc upon the tangible growth.

Naturally pink and indefinite looking, he looked pinker and more unsteady of eye and mouth than ever. He slouched in his chair, and did not even try to keep awake after the first act and intermission. Tressidar looked at him curiously, and an access of self-satisfaction surged over him, with a prayer of thankfulness that he was not as other men.

The performance over, both men swayed along with the crowd, one idea uppermost—another drink.

Suddenly Bryce clutched his companion's arm.

"There's Leslie Loring over there," he said. "Come on and I'll introduce you to her."

"Don't be an ass," answered Tressidar. "To begin with, that's not Miss Loring, and again—I already know her."

"You do?" asked Walter, in some excitement. "What do you think of her?"

"Not a bad sort," was the lofty reply.

"Too independent," announced the younger man.

"The kind who thinks herself as good or better than any man, and all that. No," he went on, focusing his eyes upon the girl ahead of them, "of course, she wouldn't be here. She and Matheson were great friends. The old girls, you know, wanted me to go in for her, in fact I did go to see her quite a lot just to please them. You know——" he broke off suddenly.

"Well?"

"You know she is worth about half a million dollars!"

"Oh," said Tressidar, not too drunk to be disgusted. There was always alive that sense of chivalry in him which shrunk from bringing a woman's name into the conversation at inopportune places.

"I found her too dogmatic," Walter went on, not noticing the other's manner, "too pedantic and self-as-as-sertive, we could never get along together, so I told the old girls"—he began to laugh cunningly—"I told the old girls that I could not, with any degree of honor, go in for her, because Math-Math-son was going in for her himself. Wasn't that immense, eh, Tressidar?"

"And what did they say?"

Walter spread out his hands, and over his pink, puffy face came a look of divine renunciation.

"Oh, they said, *that* being the case, it would never do for me to stand in Math-Math-s'n's way!"

CHAPTER VII.

"Leslie, I've brought these letters to you—they ought to be in your keeping, and there is nothing, absolutely nothing more, among his papers of a private nature. His was the cleanest life I have ever known."

Leslie took the package of letters and held it reverently. She knew before looking at them that they were from her mother to Albert Matheson, and she knew before Don told her that there was nothing secreted in his private effects that from Don's chivalrous point of view, should be held from her. She came nearer than she knew to loving Albert Matheson.

Don spoke again.

"Here is another letter to you. If you would like to read it now, I will leave these other matters and come back some other time."

"No, no," was the quick reply. "You are the most thoughtful person in the world, Don, and I have no words to tell you how I appreciate all your goodness to me during these past two weeks."

Her eyes filled with tears, and she lowered her head over the papers in her lap. From childhood she had always been deeply affected by kindness—in fact, Mr. Edge was fond of teasing her now

about an occasion when she deserved punishment for some misdeed, and deviating from former precedent, he undertook to gently remonstrate with the little girl. She bore the kind words stoically for a few moments, then bursting into a torrent of passionate tears, exclaimed:

"Oh, punish me, Zee-Zee, please punish me, but don't be kind to me!"

And Don's untiring and unobtrusive thoughtfulness was, in a measure, hard to bear; she would infinitely have preferred to fight herself, thus having the comfort of a counter-irritant. Having things done for her, always gave Leslie the sensation of incapability—inertia would have been death to her.

"Kind to you," echoed Crowley. "Oh, Leslie, darling, I know this is not the time to tell you, but I have kept it to myself *so* long, and, sweetheart girl, I love you, love you, how much you can never know!" He drew her, unresisting, to him, and kissed her hair. Then with trembling fingers he raised her face to his and very gently kissed her lips. "Do you love me, ever so little, darling?" he whispered.

The girl did not answer at once. Of course, being quite alive to a certain amount of her charm, she could not pretend to have been blind to Crowley's devotion, but vaguely looking back, she realized that if she considered the matter at all, she thought of Don as capable of doing and acting the same toward any other woman in need of a man's help and friendship.

There had always been a free and normal good fellowship characterizing their acquaintance, which Leslie did not acknowledge could hardly last for ever. For nothing stands still—not even friendship—it either is absorbed into the atmosphere whence it sprung, or it goes forward and develops into what the poets have been pleased to call the divine passion, just how divine it is—is entirely a matter of the bank account.

So Don had not been impersonal. It was because he loved her. With characteristic promptness, Leslie, almost forgetful of his presence, bent all her mental energies upon this new aspect in her life, and was startled—actually startled, when the man, the subject of her thoughts, mistaking her long silence for consent, suddenly held her close against him, and passionately whispered:

"My little wife!"

Leslie came to herself, and very gently pushed away from Don. She looked at him with far more tenderness than was warrantable, considering she was going to refuse him.

Her very astonishment was a hindrance, her mind seemed clogged, and she cast about among her shattered mental forces for firm means of settling this question.

"Don," she began, "whether you believe it or not, I never dreamed that you were in love with me! Wait," she held up her hand with an imperious little gesture, which Crowley had often noticed and loved, "I am not going to disgust you

with the 'sisterly' business, but that attitude is the best explanation I can give of my——"

"Don't," interrupted the man. "Don't say it! I believe you if you tell me, Les, and, dear little girl, I am not blaming you for my affections having been hopelessly misplaced"—he stopped a moment —"only—only every one else noticed it—even Margaret."

They both laughed.

"The age of romance and fluttering hearts seems to be passing," Leslie said, with total lack of flippancy, "and I don't look for that sort of love. But, Don, if I promised to marry you, and did not change from the way I feel toward you now—do you know I should always be afraid, *afraid* that some one would come, who would make me care as I know people *do,* this kind of a person particularly," she tapped herself gently. "I am made to be extreme," she went on, "and can imagine myself oblivious to everything, good advice, good opinion, everything but—Him."

"Leave that to me," Don answered vehemently, then he smiled. "Trust me to take good care of Him. Say you'll give me a fighting chance, Les," he begged, taking her hand again. "Some one ought to have the right to take care of you, little girl, and I am conceited enough to think I could do it well."

His voice was deep and tender, his dark blue eyes were bent earnestly upon her, and, raising her head, Leslie felt a sort of thrill pass through her, at the

sight of big, strong Don Crowley pleading with her.

It would have been easy to say yes, and drift along, leaving time to find a way of dissolution. She had done that before, accepted a man she knew she would never marry, for practically the same reason—she could never realize his growing devotion, and the obvious culmination.

It seemed so futile when he had thrown himself not too metaphorically at her feet, to feign surprise—that is to him it would be, apparently, feigned. But the truth was that Leslie, either through a certain perverse blindness, or total absence of self-appraisement, was never prepared for the culmination. It always took her so completely by surprise that she had no words of refusal ready, and if she did murmur a weak and faltering negative, misleading in its very kindness, there was always the same result leading from the fatal words —"just give me a chance—be fair." And true sport that she was, she always gave the man a chance, usually finding the reversal of the famous dictum that "absence makes the heart grow fonder." Then, by a judicious slackening of attenion on her part, which often led to harrowing and melodramatic scenes, without feeling serious pangs at severing the ties which she had assumed under protest, she dismised the unfortunate man.

Don noticed the wavering and took instant advantage of it.

"I won't worry you any more, now, dear," he

said, "but will leave you to read your letter. Count absolutely on me, never to bother you, but I shall wait—always wait for you to come to me and say, 'Don, I've changed my mind about Him.' In the meantime, things are as they always were between us, aren't they, Leslie? You won't avoid me because you know?"

And she, with her rare gift of intuition, knew well that she would never change her mind, and she knew that things would never be the same, but answered the last question with the smile which those who knew her watched for.

"I shall make a fair start by asking you to take me to Vera's to-morrow night."

Crowley had hardly closed the door before Leslie tore open the envelope containing Albert Matheson's letter to her. Don had come to explain that he had left all of his property to his beloved ward with a very few bequests to old friends, such as a few hundred dollars each to Miss Polly and Miss Libby Bryce, and a hundred dollars to Ceciley, who, when told of her inheritance, had the first and only case of hysterics in the Loring family since Mrs. Stanhope Ashbury died.

Everything else was left to Leslie for what reason the letter soon revealed.

It read:

"LITTLE LESLIE: When you open this I shall be no more—stop, you bad girl, don't blur these pages with your tears—you know Old Guardian Boy al-

ways hated to see you cry—but you must know and realize all through this letter, that I am in perfect health while writing it. I am laughing at you baby girl. Involuntarily your mind turns to me as you last saw me, supposedly in a sickbed, though if I have my way and sufficient courage, I shall not let them send for you. However, chase that goblin of regret away, and think of me now, *now*—sitting at my desk at home, sending you this little note.

"To begin with, Little Leslie, I want you to know that I love every inch of you, and that if the years go on and you invite me to ten or fifteen more birthday parties on a little card inscribed Leslie Loring, I want you to know that I am going to urge you to blot out the Loring and put Matheson in its stead. There I've told it! Of course, in such a perfectly impossible event, I can't let you have this letter, for I will have to write another one 'To my wife.'

"There, there, little silly. Love, you are crying again, and Albert Matheson is one rare brute. Please don't, darling, for even where I have gone I can see you, and *feel* you crying, and—good heavens, girl, look at your nose! Ah, that's better!

"Now, listen, and for the instant I am going to be very serious. I want you to crush the instinct to mourn, Leslie dear. It is after all a comparatively new idea, and the old one—the one of rejoicing for a departed soul who has found peace—was infinitely better. We both agreed that this

change called Death was but the opening of another Life, and if not a better one, why would the Creator have us make the change? I am happy, I have many friends here—and I have Kitty. But you will mar my happiness if you mourn, Little Leslie; you and Crowley were my little world, and I had hoped hopes and dreamed dreams which I thought wiser to confide only to my old pipe. So this applies to Don, too, I want you to think of me, yes, and talk of me, but weep for me, never!

"There was once a chap, a friend of mine, who died, and I was asked to be one of the pallbearers. As the four of us were driving home there was little attempt at conversation. We hesitated to speak cheerfully for fear of being thought heartless, and we could not, would not mourn. At last I risked the good opinion of the other three and told a very funny story. After laughing appreciatively, one of the other men exclaimed, with genuine regret: 'Oh, how I wish Morton were here to enjoy that one, Matheson!'

"In just such a way I wish you all to remember me. Will you make the effort conscientiously to please an old man who would have done anything no matter how difficult, unreasonable, or silly, to gratify your slightest whim? And explain this earnest desire of mine to the others, mischievous little Vera, and Burnley, and the dear Bryces.

"One thing more and I am finished. I am leaving you my material comforts, principally because there is no one else who has any claim whatever

upon me. You don't actually need the money, for although it grates upon my shrinking nature, I must say that my stewardship of your affairs has not been unsatisfactory. However, I want you to reserve this little sum of mine, and use it at some crisis, some crucial moment in your life (for we all have them) to help you out of a difficulty or to aid in the fulfilment of a genuine desire. I put the matter clumsily because it is vague even to me —briefly, I feel that you will want this money some day, for a specific something—and—you have it!

"That is all, Little Leslie. The instant you finish this letter I ask you not to stop to think it over. I want you to do the maddest, most impulsive thing your imaginative brain can conjure, and when Don is with you the next time—or whoever *is* Don, then *talk* it over, do not *think* it!

"ALBERT MATHESON."

Leslie sat a moment with the letter in her lap, a thousand thoughts crying for her notice and assortment. But true to a trust, and feeling as one might who was turned round three times, then told to look for the collar button, she rose and walked aimlessly into the den. Just at her hand was the telephone. Ah, so much was accomplished—she would 'phone some one. Whom? Open upon the table lay a note of regret from Clifford Scott, a nice boy, the youngest member of the club to which Matheson belonged. The second point was settled. She would telephone the club. Quite unexpectedly

the name of Tressidar occurred to her, with such suddenness, in fact, she had the impression of having heard it spoken.

Yes, Mr. Tressidar was at that moment in the club; would she wait?

"Are you there, Mr. Tressidar?"

"Yes."

"This is Leslie Loring."

"How do you do?" came through the receiver, gracious, but entirely unsurprised, unenthusiastic.

"Oh, I'm vulgarly healthy," Leslie answered, with a tinge of petulance. "Don't let us discuss my health. I wanted to know if you felt like being bagged this afternoon, right away, or are you already in the hunter's toils?"

"Not at all" (Tressidar said "not-a-tall") "delighted, I'm sure. I will come right away, and thank you so much. Good-by."

Leslie hung up the receiver with a queer sense of having acted through no volition of her own, and sat dazedly looking at the clock, without seeing it. It's chime suddenly aroused her, and she ran into her room, calling for Ceciley.

"Come, dress me, quickly; I'm in a hurry," she said, in rather an excited manner.

Ceciley laid a snuff-colored broadcloth on the couch.

"I don't want to touch your hair, baby, dear. It looks too lovely to be disturbed."

Leslie looked at herself critically, then nodded, smiling.

The gown was a credit to Osmonde. Both loose and tight, it hung in clinging, graceful folds over the girl's rounded hips, actuating her willowy slimness and youthfulness of form; it's scant trimming, consisting of hand-embroidered bands of the material, lay in classic folds across her breast, and the long, tight, crushed-chiffon sleeves completed the effect of straightness and simplicity.

Ceciley put a heavy gold filagree band across the girl's forehead and pulled out her hair the least bit over her ears. Under the soft shaded light it had a wonderful burnished look, quite impossible to imitate, and the shade of the gown heightened that effect.

Mistress and maid were satisfied, and smiled into each other's eyes, as the bell sounded.

"Tell Hattie that I think Mr. Tressidar will be here for dinner," Leslie said, laughing, as she left the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

A day can be busy in two ways; one by having numbers of duties crowded into it—duties upon which the mind must be bent in harmony with their manual performance, and another, in which the mind does its work alone, when there are problems to solve, or be considered, requiring no aid outside itself. There had been many such for Leslie, and she used to cause her friends much amusement by saying: "I have been tremendously busy to-day!"

"Busy? Doing what?"

"Thinking!"

To-day was another "thinking day." First there was Don to consider in a new light, next was Mr. Matheson's message, and last there was Tressidar.

Although quite positive that her decision in regard to Don was right and final, there were several points to contemplate. To begin with, *suppose* she should reconsider him—there was every reason that she should—could she ever love him? "Margaret and I are the best of friends, Don knows me well, and in spite of that loves me—I mean I have never tried to please him—he stands in just such a position to me, as dear Mathy did to my

mother—I trust him," then she laughed. "Why, beside this comfortable friendship I feel for dear old Don, *love* would be a cyclone, a tempest, something utterly beyond my control. No, I shall not reconsider him.

Then, she argued, she must make her answer more decisive. Playing with a man was too much at variance with her high sense of honor, to enter into Leslie's calculation for an instant. Yet it would be awkward, in spite of what he said, to be constantly thrown with Don, it being quite impossible for either of them to forget the conversation, even though they did not refer to it.

Leslie had often said that she could decide a question in half the time that any one else required. She did it by that wonderful power of concentration. She bent all her energies upon the subject, ran the pros and cons over in swift comparison—making a clear mental picture, and decided.

When that decision was made it was final, and when she couldn't decide, it meant that she had not yet been able to concentrate.

Many people bring out a subject for review, turning it around carefully between thumb and forefinger, then lock it up again in the mental wardrobe, only to be brought forth once more and viewed in a different light. Such a way would have made Leslie a jibbering imbecile. She frequently said to Margaret Crowley: "Dont' think *long,* think hard!"

Don, therefore, was laid aside, and there was no

danger that he would intrude himself upon her further consideration.

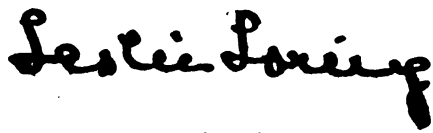
Albert Matheson's letter needed a certain amount of thought, not strenuous or decisive, but, rather, lingering, passive, vague, almost uncertain, there being no necessity to drive her mind along any given channel, or arrive at a conclusion. It was a tender, mental amble. There was much the same sensation as that upon waking an hour earlier than the usual time for rising, and having the intense satisfaction of knowing there was nothing to do but lie there and revel in the knowledge that it was not time to get up.

How delicately he had put the matter of the money. Of course he could have left it to some one else, but because of a presentiment that she might need it, he had left it to her. What, by the way, did those words mean? Albert Matheson was not a man of idle fancies—he must have had something in his mind. But what? There is something weirdly prophetic about the words of one who has departed—trite banalities seem to take on gigantic significances; like the words of the soothsayers, we fit them to the occasion at hand, and awesomely whisper: "It is as he said!"

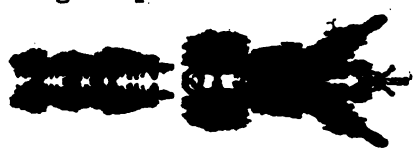
He had loved her! Humanly enough, Leslie, losing for the instant that keenness of which she liked to boast, crowned her guardian with a halo of devotion and sentiment she would have considered mawkish a few weeks ago. No one could ever take his place.

On the table lay some slips of paper, relics of the evening previous, when she and Tressidar had been making ghosts. This peculiar form of amusement had entertained the Englishman immensely, and the absolute childish abandon with which his hostess threw herself into the spirit of it, charmed him more than he realized at the time.

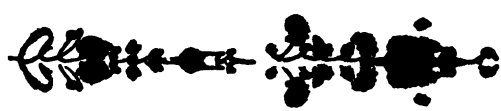
Leslie wrote her name with a heavy pen, like this:



then folded the paper directly underneath, blotting it; the result was supposed to look like she would, after shedding her present material form.



Tressidar made a particularly ethereal ghost, his writing being small, round, and concise.



"One would never imagine from your present form," he said, looking across the table, "how

buxom a ghost you are to become. Really, those proportions are quite earthly. Unless I keep this likeness continually before me, I doubt that I shall recognize you."

"Well, this"—pointing to a particularly blackened mark—"*this*, Mr. Tressidar, is the prescribed ——"

"Red carnation," interrupted Algy triumphantly.

"Exactly!"

"I suppose that being entirely original, there will be no danger of duplicates?" he asked, apparently a prey to searching doubt.

In exaggerated seriousness, Leslie puckered her brow and shook her head vaguely.

"I can't vouch for it," she murmured, "the world is full of imitators."

"Then I must keep this constantly before me," Tressidar said positively. "In other words, we will exchange photographs—I beg you to autograph this."

After a moment's writing Leslie said:

"Well, it pleases me to note that our positions will be reversed, for no matter how complex and opaque you may be now, at *this* stage of the game," laying her finger on the slip bearing Algy's signature, "I shall be able to see through you, with the greatest ease. Really, I never saw anything so filmy and transparent."

"The men of our family have always been lean," sighed Tressidar apologetically.

Leslie laughed outright, as she remembered all

the nonsense they had talked, the happy, bubbling, irrepressible nonsense of total absence of constraint; in other words, their congeniality delighted her. She remembered, with a thrill of pleasure, how easily Tressidar had dropped into seriousness the instant Mr. Matheson was mentioned, and how sympathetically he seemed to listen to her talk of him—the evening was far too short, and the instant he was gone Leslie thought of a dozen positively brilliant things she might have said.

The 'phone rang, and Vera's voice, tense and excited, asked:

"*What* do you think has happened?"

"Calamitous or otherwise?"

"Oh, otherwise," was the quick reply, followed by a delicious giggle.

"Walter's engagement is broken," suggested Leslie.

"No—you'll never guess"—a forceful pause, then —"*Margaret has a suitor!*"

Presently Vera shrieked: "Are you there, Les? Speak promptly, or I shall accuse myself of murder in the telephonic degree."

"Here, but fainting," Leslie whispered. "Is it in human form?"

"Ay, verily, in the form of a socialist, green clothes, spectacles, rubber-bandaged umbrella, and all. He is coming to-night. And, see here, who else do you think I've got?"

"Break it gently, whoever it is——"

"Tom Edge!"

"Oh, splendid! Vera, your party is a heaven-born idea—there is only one flaw," she added.

"I know, I know," interrupted the other quickly, "but remember what he said, what he wished. Don told me last night. Are you coming with Don?"

"Yes."

"Well, good-by! I have dozens of things to do."

"Can't I help?"

"Oh, no, thank you, my dear. My hair, and my nails, and really important things like that, you know. Good-by!"

Vera's house was ideal for entertaining, and she took especial pride in having it look its best the night of her triumphant reëntry into the New York social life, after three years of mourning.

Sitting with Tressidar against a background of beautiful violet blossoms in the far end of the conservatory, Leslie wondered whether by any Satanic intuition he guessed that she had led him there by dark design.

Guiltily, she lowered her eyes, as he said very gently:

"I wonder whether you know how beautiful you look against those flowers! You *must* know that you look very, very lovely to-night—your maid and your mirror have told you."

By the time Tressidar had completed his first sentence the girl was perfect mistress of herself, and, looking at him with sparkling eyes, she answered:

"If you think for a moment I am going to say,

'Oh, don't be silly,' or even murmur a modest 'thank you,' you're wrong. That is just the kind of talk I can stand for hours; in fact, there is no limit to my endurance, so pray speak on, stranger, your story interests me!"

After a moment Tressidar said:

"I seem fated to deal in personalities to-night, but, really, you have the most infectious laugh I ever heard. I am not laughing at what you said, I am laughing because you laugh."

"Better and better," sighed Leslie, closing her eyes in languid enjoyment. "Really you are a very superior person, Mr. Tressidar."

"We seem to agree admirably upon every point, Miss Loring. By the way, do you believe in the transmigration of souls?"

Leslie sat suddenly erect upon the rustic divan. Albert Matheson's image came vividly into her mind.

"Are you serious?" she asked slowly.

And he, surprised at the rapid change in her, laughingly answered:

"Of course not! I was only wondering where I had known you before. You seem to link me with a long-forgotten past; in that I am serious."

"Cross my palm with silver," began the girl flippantly, "and you shall know all I know." Then, looking at him a little strangely, he thought, she went on: "Once there was a horrid English child named Algy (his brother called it 'Elgy'), who came to New York for his health, perhaps, or for

his parents' health—they may have needed a rest. He was a little bully, and not nice at all to the other children in the hotel, but he seemed to choose a small girl in preference to the others to act as a foil to his questionable deeds of valor."

She leaned back, and, raising both white arms, clasped her hands behind her head, the tips of her elbows being very close to Tressidar's cheek. His inscrutable, yellow eyes narrowed imperceptibly while he watched the girl, and he bent forward slightly to catch her words.

"Now, the girl did not like the boy—of course boy and girl are spelled with capital letters—they always are in books, you know—she did not like the peremptory way he ordered her to do things, she did not like being a massacred person any more than he did, and one day when he took hold of her hair, and held her, she thought he was going to scalp her again against her will. She raised an angry face to his, only to receive——" there was a very long pause, and Algy moved a shade nearer. The veil of years rolled away as though by magic, and he could feel a mass of tangled hair on his arm and in his hands, now; he could feel the hot, sharp breath upon his face—God, he could still thrill with the exultation of that remembrance, glorying in his power to hold, by brute force, this thing he wanted in his grasp.

"Yes," he whispered very slowly.

"A wet and sloppy kiss!"

Tressidar forced a laugh, and wondered just how unconscious Leslie was of her power.

"You have an excellent memory," he said, feeling obliged to make a reply. "I could do much better now," he added, only half conscious of his words.

It was what she might have expected, indeed, it was an obvious remark, and yet Leslie was disconcerted. She used all her self-control to hide this fact, and was secretly pleased to know that neither by word nor look did she betray the least astonishment or discomfort. However, this from Tressidar was so disconcerting; he had such a way of saying things as though there was no possible doubt as to their accomplishment. Leslie replied to his first sentence:

"Oh, I don't deserve much credit for such a feat of memory. The night you dined at the Crowley's your name sounded vaguely familiar, and when I happened to mention it to Ceciley *she* enlightened me. She was with my mother then, you know. Perhaps you have forgotten how I slapped you?"

"It was worth it," was the quick reply, not as lightly spoken as Tressidar may have wished.

CHAPTER IX.

"I have been looking everywhere for you, Leslie, supper is mine," announced Clifford Scott, appearing at this very opportune moment.

"Don't be peevish, Clifford, or your oysters won't agree with you," answered the girl soothingly. "Who is your fate?" she asked, turning to Tressidar.

"Mrs. Stearns said she had arranged eight of us at one table, I think, and I was to be personally responsible for her guest, Miss Brabazon."

"Splendid," cried Leslie enthusiastically. "You will surely love Angelique, won't he, Clifford? She is one of the most fascinating girls I know. Didn't you like her when you met her?"

"I thought her quite amusing," was Tressidar's unenthusiastic reply.

"Oh, you make me rage, with all your English conservatism!" stormed the girl. "You are either a fish, or else you put such a curb on a really good impulse that some day when you want one you will find it cruelly strangled."

Both men laughed at her vehemence, and the Englishman asked teasingly:

"Is enthusiasm a good impulse?"

"Sometimes," Leslie answered quickly. "But I particularly meant the capacity for admiration."

They were unable to discuss the matter further for a great clamor was raised by the rest of the party waiting for supper.

Choruses of "Where have you been?" and "We have been starving for hours," were heard from all sides.

As Leslie seated herself, she turned haughtily to the group.

"We have been discussing a previous existence," she said.

"Ciel," ejaculated the little French girl, "he ess her one—how do you say, Mr. Tressidar—*hobo*?"

"Oh, Angelique," chided Mrs. Stearns, "you must not call the gentleman names. That is shocking bad form."

"What haf I said?" Angelique questioned, in embarrassed alarm. "Ah, monsieur," she continued pitifully, "dis horrible English of yours it is mek me so angry! Me, I go to New York to Madame to learn English, and, voila, when I get dere I fin' Madame, she make every one to spik French. And de girls—even Leslie—she don't help me not a little, she say, 'Angelique, it is beautiful to hear you spik lak dat, but me, I must to learn French,' and lak every one else who do what she say, me, I always spik French to Leslie, till Monsieur, she is spik lak one native."

Tressidar turned to the girl beside him.

"There is really nothing you can't do, is there?" he asked, in a low tone.

But Miss Loring, after a peculiar glance at him, turned to young Scott without answering, and Algy felt rebuffed, for in his way he had meant to compliment her.

"I remember the day Leslie came to school, don't you, Margaret? We all congregated in Elsie Davies' room to talk her over and vote as to whether she was eligible to the Upper Ten."

"I remember that I liked her at once, Vera," answered Margaret Crowley, in her precise way, "but you and Elsie were inclined to consider her too forward."

She turned to the man beside her, Herbert Carter, the socialist.

"We were schoolmates, Mr. Carter," she explained, "and I fear that at these little reunions every one else suffers."

"Reminiscences are always interesting," murmured the man perfunctorily.

"I gather that Miss Loring was admitted to the Upper Ten," suggested Tressidar.

"Oh, yes," Angelique continued, while Vera and Burnley leaned forward to hear her. "So ver' many zings happened that day to mek her like. At study hour she do Vera's h-algebra, she fin' h-answers to Milly Cross' histoire, ah"—she spread out her hands—"she tell us after, she say to herself, she *mek* us to love her."

Tressidar laughed, and was a little surprised that

the others did not join him. He saw, with amusement, that they took Angelique's words quite seriously.

Vera, after glancing in her guest's direction and finding her engrossed in something Clifford Scott was saying, leaned a little farther across the table, and fixed her large, dark eyes on Algy.

"You are amused by our seriousness, aren't you?" she asked, just a little resentfully. Then, without waiting for an answer: "It is true, what Angie says—Leslie made up her mind that we should like her—that sufficed. To begin with, she has magnetism," she paused, and Tressidar, still amused, nodded, "added to that, she is a natural-born actress; again, she realized even at that age the way to win people. I mean by that she was adaptable—when with Margaret Crowley she was quite a different sort of girl than the one she was with me, for instance, and it was not affected, she feels genuine sympathy toward her companion of the moment. She is the unusual sort of person who magnetizes women as well as men."

"I tremble," murmured the Englishman tragically.

"Oh, you are joke," sighed Angie Brabazon. "Just wait till you know her better!"

"I tremble more," laughed the man outright.

"Know whom?" asked Leslie, turning suddenly toward them.

"We were speaking of the old schooldays," Vera

interrupted. "Do you remember the elevator boy who fell in love with you?"

"Oh, Vera," protested Leslie, getting painfully red under her clear skin.

"Who?" asked Tressidar.

"The elevator boy," repeated Mrs. Stearns. "First of all, he confided his attachment to one of the maids—swearing her to secrecy as to his identity. Then with that powerful and ubiquitous ally as messenger, he bestowed his entire salary (including tips) upon the innocent object of his affections, in various ways—flowers, candy, books, lovely gold-embossed things—Ella Wilcox's Poems of Passion, Oscar Wilde, a magnificent copy of Byron——"

"Vera," Leslie's voice held something of a command, "stop at once, I insist! Don't believe it, Mr. Tressidar," she turned to him, quite overlooking Herbert Carter, who had ceased speaking to Margaret and was listening to Mrs. Stearns.

But Vera, spurred by the obvious interest and whole-souled attention of her audience, wrinkled her eyes to mere dots of dancing mischief, and proceeded:

"Leslie, thinking it was the assistant clergyman of Grace Church, who had hinted at a hopeless attachment for her, upon one of our 'at homes,' continued to ride up and down in the proximity of the adoring Henry, blissfully unconscious of the burning flame in his breast. At last"—she gloated over the climax—"one dark and stormy night, when

Leslie was alone in the elevator, having been sent for to see a visitor, Henry seized the opportunity of casting discretion to the winds and made a passionate avowal, in his descent. The sad story came to light—through no word of the siren's," pointing a dramatic finger at Miss Loring, who sat in dignified silence waiting for the end of these very annoying disclosures—"no, she never even hinted of the occurrence to us—her sworn, tried, and true friends. It was through Henry himself, in a moment of inebriation, that the painful truth came to be known."

Margaret Crowley, sympathizing somewhat with Leslie's discomfiture, added her plea that Vera should speak of something else—only to be silenced by an imperious wave of the hand, and an audible aside to Mr. Carter.

"She is only jealous because it did not happen to her. Believe me, ladies and gentlemen, her character is irreproachable! *To* continue, Henry made a fatal error—he got drunk, shuffled to Leslie's door ***himself*** with another love offering—I have forgotten whether in the morn I bring thee roses or violets—and Madame, who happened to be conversing with her dearly beloved at that inopportune moment, ferreted out the lamentable affair."

"Oh, but you have not told," interposed Angelique, "how when Leslie saw him drunk she say to Madame, do not blame him, poor zing, and she faint."

"I was coming to that," replied Mrs. Stearns,

with crushing hauteur. "So annoying to have the climax of a good story spoiled," she continued, in a tone of mock despair to an imaginary person behind her.

"Why did she faint?" asked Tressidar of Angelique, so interested that he forgot Leslie herself could have answered with far greater satisfaction.

"Ah, she is so—so—sick, so sorry to see any one drunk." The girl frowned impatiently at her inability to speak her thoughts with clearness, "she is mek sick to see any one who is lak dat," she repeated.

"As long as the outstanding feature of this whole supper seems to have been the repetition of my name," Leslie herself interposed, "Mr. Tressidar, I will say that by some peculiar inheritance, perhaps, instead of knowing fear, a distaste for any particular animal, or such—I have always been made violently ill at the sight of any one under the influence of liquor. Of course, Vera has exaggerated all this affair"—with a deprecating wave of the hand as though to free his mind from all remembrance of it—"but the fact is that I was dreadfully upset by what Henry said to me in the elevator, and when I saw him standing in my doorway, with Madame's cold, critical eyes fixed upon him, and saw him oblivious to her presence, stagger foolishly forward toward *me,* I succumbed to the old horror and fainted. Has every one finished—the room is so close?"

George Burnley rose, and, going to Leslie's side,

whispered: "Come with me, we will go into the conservatory."

But Algy Tressidar, who had overheard, begged for the privilege of going with her if Mlle. Brabazon would excuse him. To the anxious clamorings of the rest of the party, Leslie smiled quietly, and assured them that she was not ill, a few moments in cooler atmosphere would make a great difference. Her face had lost something of it's gayety, and was very white. At the moment she appealed to Algy strongly, and it was with real solicitude that he led her through the door of the conservatory to the place they had been.

The guests had all left before Clifford Scott came to take Leslie in to supper—that is, all of them save the few intimate friends Vera had asked to stay later, and a strange quiet pervaded the house so noisy but an hour before.

"I am afraid you blame me somewhat for this —do you?" he anxiously asked, looking into her eyes.

"Oh, no." Leslie tried to speak lightly. She had a great contempt for any sort of physical weakness, and claimed still that in the long run her will would conquer this one. The very remembrance of that night, so tragic in the foolishness, caused her such acute dizziness and nausea that it required an immense amount of the will, she loved to feel, to keep herself from fainting.

"But you *are* ill," Tressidar went on, revelling in the dependence which made her lean a little upon

him. "Tell me what to get for you? Really, I'm *awfully* sorry."

Leslie's lips parted in a smile. The words were so conventional—the tone so nearly resembling the one he used to say the same words at Margaret Crowley's home. Could nothing rouse him?

At that instant two forms appeared in the doorway. One was that of Morton, Vera Stearn's most excellent man, the other was Walter Bryce.

He was trying to shake off the butler's detaining hand and pushed roughly past him into the conservatory. Catching sight of Tressidar he came as quickly forward as his uncertain steps and vision would permit.

"Ver' man—want to see," he mumbled thickly, "want you t' come, spend night with me. Got rooms—downtown—where were b'fore—lots booze —— Ah," his manner changed to a would-be gallant carelessness—"see you with a lady—sorry to disturb you. Lesh-lie, by God! My, but you're shtunning—always thought——"

"Stop!" cried Algy, springing forward, and as he did so the crowd of people from supper came gayly into the room. Don Crowley overlooked Bryce at first, his eyes sought only Leslie, standing white and silent under a great palm. But Burnley took in the situation at a glance and grasped Walter's arm lightly.

"Come and have a drink, old man," he whispered. "Hurry!"

"Not without m' old college chum, Tresshidar,"

he stuttered obstinately. "Want him, too! See, he's going in for th' heiressh," he whispered in a perfectly audible hiss, "hate t' 'sturb him!"

"Don," cried Leslie, taking a tottering step forward, "Don, oh, please take him away!"

Crowley sprang forward, but not in time to prevent Leslie from falling, a soft, sweet burden into Algy's outstretched arms.

CHAPTER X.

Algernon Tressidar awoke earlier the next morning than usual, which circumstance needs comment owing to the fact that he had lain awake hours after getting to bed.

"I wish I could keep from being forever tangled with some woman," he thought irritably. "If I stay here—— Egad! I see the consequences, now, and if I go—well, I don't want to go just yet. There is the governor to placate."

For a few moments his mind wandered back to his home, to his parents, to his last interview with Sir Anthony. It was not a pleasant reminiscence for the forenoon, so he allowed the picture of Leslie to blot out such disagreeable memories.

Tressidar went over, bit by bit, his association with her, not omitting their very first meeting, so many years ago. He tried to analyze her childish attraction for him then, but finally gave it up. He asked himself if she really attracted him now, and couldn't answer. Certainly she amused him—she was good to look at, she was pleasing to talk with, she satisfied his fastidious taste in little things.

"I see *you* are going in for the heiress," Bryce had said. "Damned beast!" Algy thought angrily, "why can't a man drink like a gentleman?"

Certainly he was not "going in for her." Must he have matrimonial designs upon every woman to whom he paid attention? Ah, in India it was different. There was Claire Fairborough, a woman past thirty, fully conscious of her powers, and her fascination for him, and *she* had not expected him to marry her.

Still, he had not needed—— Ah, well, that was past; but *this* idea, the maudlin figment of a befuddled brain, recurred so persistently that at last, quite annoyed, the Englishman got out of bed, looked at his watch, and, finding it was only half-past ten, allowed himself the luxury of swearing steadily for five minutes in Hindustani.

Then, being somewhat relieved, he 'phoned to the café for breakfast, taking the precaution to start the day with an eye opener, lit a cigarette, and sat down, once more, to think.

Altogether, he was not having a poor time of it in New York. The men were very nice, the club an excellent one, and the women—bother the women, anyway!

And yet, because he was not self-analytical, Algy Tressidar would have been surprised to know how dependent he was upon women. Leslie had certainly been fascinating the night before. Her fair hair parted on her forehead, and held back by a heavy jet band, glowed like an aureole. Her eyes —blue, violet, gray, hazel, what were they?— changed so rapidly they were bewildering. Bewildering, he repeated the word, that described her

exactly. He never knew what he should find, he never knew precisely whether she was serious or joking; he loved to see her blue eyes dance; he loved to see her gray eyes, large, humid, shadowy, as they were on the afternoon Matheson died. Perhaps that explained her charm, it was her variableness.

"Going in for the heiress"—the heiress—well, after all, why not? The pater was assuredly holding out very creditably against his advances toward reconciliation, and although a mercenary marriage in its literal sense did not appeal to Tressidar, he had always claimed that it would be a lucky day for him when he married a fortune. What a softhearted little soul she was, too! Aching with pity for a lout of a menial who had dared fall in love with her, and what a queer thing this fainting at the sight of an intoxicated person. "I suppose I should have to become quite respectable," he mused whimsically over his rolls and coffee. Then a sudden revulsion of feeling swept over him, and he laughed aloud.

"What a bally ass I am," he scoffed. "I don't even pretend to care about her."

Notwithstanding this conclusion, Tressidar telephoned an order for a dozen American beauties to be sent to Miss Loring. About noon, his mind still travelling along that channel, he 'phoned Leslie herself, to ask how she was. Ceciley answered the call. No, Miss Loring was not at home, she had a club meeting in the morning and had not returned;

she might be at Miss Crowley's. Was there any message? Tressidar left his number, then half regretted it. He was not sure he wanted to see Leslie, after all. And, having begun to weigh the matter for and against, without coming to a decision, he waited for a call all the afternoon, at first with something like relief, and then surprise, and toward dinner time he was keenly irritated. Either Miss Loring had poorly trained servants, or else was careless about her obligations. It never occurred to Algy to do as Don Crowley or Clifford Scott, or any of Leslie's other friends would have done, ring up the apartment again.

That evening he spent at the Crowley's, and while thoroughly enjoying the quiet dignity of their home, he was unconscionably bored by Margaret's ponderousness—her distressing conventionality, through which he clearly saw a ludicrous attempt to interest him. As he expected, they talked a great deal of Leslie, who seemed to be a most pervading person, and Tressidar carried home a fund of quaint anecdotes about the girl, who so persistently claimed a share of his thoughts.

In the first mail on the following morning was a little note from her, thanking the Englishman for his flowers, half-humorously apologizing for her childish lack of control the night previous, and asking him to have tea with her the same afternoon.

"I will have Angelique, Vera, and some others whom you may be interested to know," she wrote, "that is, if we provincial Gothamites can interest

you at all. You really prefer life among the Indians, don't you, with massacres as a daily diversion?"

"It will be rather a nuisance," thought Algy. "I never liked crowds, but I might inveigle her ("her" meant Leslie) to go to the theatre afterward. I have a sort of curiosity to see what kind of gown she will wear."

This was not as foolish as it sounded, for it was a well-known and discussed fact among Leslie's friends, that no two styles of dresses became her alike. Chamelion-like, she seemed to take tone from her clothes, and because Osmonde built them the tone was very good. When in a riding habit she looked severely tailor made, formal, and aloof-ish. In her home she looked cozy, and, as Vera said, as though her name should be Sue. In the summer time, down in Edgeville, or at Vera's country home, Leslie gave the appearance of being simply a healthy, normal girl, putting her heart into the game of tennis, which she played with so much vigor. At a dinner, with carefully coiffed hair, and a soft, clinging, elusive gown of one of the indefinite shades she loved to wear, Leslie was vague, subtle, powerful.

Without explaining this to himself, Algy recognized and liked it.

The tea was very enjoyable, after all. There was a struggling young painter, de Forest, there was Mildred Grant, the authoress; and a Count de Vinville; there were Angelique Brabazon, Vera, Tom

Edge, the Crowleys, and about a dozen others. But when it was all over and Tressidar was alone with his hostess, he found himself content to accept her invitation to dinner, and did not bother going out at all.

The next three or four weeks were marked by daily jaunts with Leslie. He found her as attractive a guide as any man. She seemed to know by instinct all the queer little out-of-the-way places to go for tea, or supper. They sometimes went shopping, Leslie delving in musty second-hand stores for odd bits of jewelry or books. Invariably they admired the same thing, invariably their suggestions coincided, and during those days Tressidar half forgot Walter Bryce's insinuation, and gave himself up to the enjoyment of Leslie's presence. Once in a while he would look at her curiously, wondering whether her yielding manner held in it anything other than friendliness. There were moments when he decided that it did, and, somewhat petulantly, he would wish she were harder to win. Then suddenly she would change absolutely, and with ingenious frankness make a remark entirely altering his view.

Algy could not help being lover-like, his every action spoke of deep, absorbing interest in the one at hand. Leslie had noticed the same thing in other men, too, and rather liked it. But with the others there were sudden lapses into the spoken word, and that broke the charm—words are so superfluous and inexperienced; subtlety so fascinating

and worldly wise. With Tressidar he always seemed just on the point of saying the word, of confirming the suspicion, as it were, but never really did so.

To Leslie the dangerous joy of playing a serious game was too great to resist. Here she had no scruples, because she felt that if either of them were unequal to the bout, that one was herself. Tressidar certainly attracted her keenly, and she found herself devoting a great deal of thought to him.

His apparent total lack of impulse fascinated her; it seemed to stand for gigantic strength, latent, waiting a fitting opportunity for showing itself. There was mad joy in breaking down, one by one, little attitudes of restraint toward her personally. There was alluring happiness in the thought that she, herself, had to pave the way toward the cessation of trivial conventionalities, the breaking down of which almost any other man would have taken upon himself. In other words, she had to encourage him to drop a certain amount of formality.

His apparent hesitancy in making light of physical contact appealed particularly to Leslie's sensitiveness. To her it represented the epitome of chivalry—of reverence. In helping her in or out of a hansom, for example, his hand never lingered one moment longer than seemed necessary to show every consideration and attention. In saying good night, after a congenial evening when their

very nearness would perhaps seem to warrant or condone an exaggerated expression of pleasure in her society, Tressidar shook hands as formally, as *aloofly,* as with Margaret Crowley.

One afternoon in March, when walking home from an uptown tea room, Leslie and Algy battled against the fiercest wind they had ever encountered. The girl's face was stung, and in some places her tender skin was blistered; her hands, protected only by thin kid gloves, ached with such cruel persistence that tears rolled down her smarting cheeks. She flatly refused to let Tressidar 'phone for a cab, as they were only a few blocks from home.

Arrived at the apartment, Ceciley herself was no more tender and solicitous than Algy. He showed himself in a different light to both women. It was he who deftly unfastened Leslie's veil and found three hatpins without the usual masculine clumsiness, leaving her hair in it's accustomed waves; he did these things while Ceciley went for hot water and brandy. And it was Algy who, in the gentlest manner, removed Leslie's gloves, and took the red, stiffened fingers in his own. Then, with the slightest hesitation, the least trace of diffidence, he bent nearer her and said:

"I think the pain should soon disappear by my holding your hands in mine—that is if I may? Quite gently, you see—this way."

Leslie raised her deep-blue eyes to his an instant, and was conscious that the blood rushed to her cheeks. She realized with bitter humiliation that

even in Tressidar's tone there was nothing more than a desire to ease her suffering, there was nothing in his clasp to indicate that he did this for her because she was Leslie, yet subtly his attitude implied that he *did,* that if she encouraged him sufficiently he would allow himself greater freedom of speech and action. He always made Leslie feel as though *she* held him in check.

Tressidar closed his hold over the girl's two hands a trifle, and repeated softly: *"If I may?"*

Ceciley returned with the brandy, which she held to Leslie's lips. After swallowing a mouthful and making a wry face, she again raised her eyes to the man standing before her, and said, in a perfectly natural tone:

"You certainly may, only it seems cruel to let you share my torture. You must feel as though you held a lump the size of the north pole. Wasn't I stupid to have forgotten my muff?"

"Size," repeated Algy, in that same elusive, tender voice. "Size—what of size? These hands are the very smallest I have ever seen. Size is merely relative, comparative. *What* is size?"

"That reminds me," answered Kitty Loring's daughter, closing her eyes to shadowy, dreamy pools of gray, "that reminds me of an answer I once gave at school, regarding size. I was asked why is paper sized?"

"And?"

"And I cleverly answered, with almost a contempt

for my teacher at the childishness of her question: 'Why, to fit the envelope, of course.'"

She broke into a ringing peal of laughter, and, being truly feminine, she felt, rather than saw, the astonishment Algy experienced at her swift regain of self-control, the total absence of shyness, of coquetry or self-consciousness which he might reasonably have expected. She took keen delight in realizing intuitively that he asked himself, in that moment: "Could I have been mistaken, after all? But *why* the blush?"

CHAPTER XI.

"Vera, what a goose you are," complained Leslie, laughing. "That fairy tale you told me about Margaret's socialist. Why *will* you tell lies?"

"So much more interesting than the bald truth," answered Mrs. Stearns laconically. "Good heavens, what would prosaic life be, stripped of a little, mild exaggeration, of a few rosy lights, of a peck or two of lurid tarrididdles? Just what fib do you refer to, Miss Loring?"

"Well, to begin with, you said that Mr. Carter wore green clothes, or was it goggles? and tied his umbrella in the middle with an elastic band, so that I expected to see him deftly reverse the uses of his knife and fork, drink out of his finger bowl, or pour his coffee into his saucer."

Vera laughed. "Oh, well, you know what they are generally like. I just used him as a type."

The girls were sitting in Harmonie Hall, waiting for Herbert Carter's lecture. Leslie had always been more or less interested in Socialism, and association with Margaret Crowley, for whom she had a genuine fondness, even though it was not a congenial affection, had grounded her in many socialistic theories. Mrs. Stearns, thirsting for

fads, clutched at this with characteristic fervor. Margaret used to say sometimes, making her nearest approach at a joke, that had Leslie not been born rich, she would have been a socialist. Just what her meaning was nobody ever fathomed, unless she implied that because of luxurious tastes and an abundance with which to satisfy them, Leslie had never felt the desire to concentrate upon anything, she hardly understood the enormity of the issues at stake.

Herbert Carter was a man of forty-five or six. He was a man of the people, a man who knew every phase of the struggles of men. He was a peculiar combination of visionary and revolutionist, always looking far ahead into the Utopia of his dreams, always seeing near at hand the bitterness, the futility of the fight, until the masses are more capable of helping themselves; forever plotting, planning, toward some scheme for the world's betterment, some scheme, alas! too gigantic for any save men of his own calibre to do more than grasp.

As he stood now upon the unlovely, unadorned platform, he radiated a rugged force, a genuineness of purpose which appealed to every member of the audience. Tall, spare, and slightly stooped, with a naturally high forehead, his lack of hair heightened the effect so that he seemed to have tiny lines running back to the middle of his head. Keen blue eyes looked out from overhanging brows, drawn together by long hours of concentrated thought, a large straight mouth, not very prepossessing ex-

cept in its cleanness, a chin square at the base, with the slightest suggestion of a cleft in it, Carter was a man whom people never forgot.

"I am here to speak to you this afternoon," he began, in a slow, even voice, "on a subject of vital interest to the world. In fact, it is the only subject which can hold us all in its huge grasp, which can bring us the peace and happiness which should be ours—Socialism.

"There is nothing else in all of life but Socialism, it embraces everything, in its true and broadest sense it stands for the brotherhood of man. I am glad to tell you that our party more than doubles it's number every four years in the United States, and in Europe they did so, until now they have in every parliament a strong, disciplined, uncompromising minority, which seeks *reform,* not office! We do not consider the individual, we consider work for the Cause. We are not aiming to win, *yet!* We want a majority of Socialists, not votes. We can't hope to be more than a minority until the people know enough to want to work together, we can't hope to have a coöperative commonwealth until then, and when that is accomplished they will have developed a common sense of common service, and a drilled capacity for coöperative labor. That is the essence of Socialism, that idea of coöperation, of working for common, instead of individual, good. In that way you will get just as much as in this one-sided way in vogue at present. Putting the matter childishly: If every one works for you,

will you not get just as much, and more, as though you tried to grasp everything for yourself?

"Socialism is a science," Carter continued, appealing to his audience as though expecting some one to deny it. "It is an interpretation of history, a theory of social evolution, not a mere visionary Utopia, it is a religion, a faith, a hard, cold calculation, that because things were, they are as they are, and because they are as now, they must, perforce, be something different; and that difference will tend more and more to the conditions exemplified in Socialism."

He spoke for an hour, ending feelingly with Herbert Spencer's famous dictum:

"None can be free till all are free; none can be happy till all are happy."

There was another dinner at the Crowley's afterward to which Leslie, Tressidar, Vera, Angelique, Tom, and George Burnley were asked. Don had left for the South some days previous, and Leslie almost laughed at Margaret's ponderous efforts to be both host and hostess.

The lecturer, one of the guests, shone in a much more mellow light than at Vera's supper. He seemed to have got nearer them all, and talked with ease and unrestraint upon the theme so dear to his heart.

Margaret Crowley, after the first course was served, appeared at her best. She had studied the doctrines of Carter for some years, and was almost as familiar with them as was the man him-

self, and it was she who for the most part answered Leslie's many questions, turning every now and then a little deferentially (for her) to the man from whom she learned these theories.

"And do you mean to tell me that you would encourage trusts?" asked Leslie incredulously. "Why, I thought the battle cry was 'Down with the trusts!'"

"Not at all," cried Margaret, with animation. "It is the private owners of the trusts who do harm. Do you not remember the last time we discussed these things, I was reading you a speech of Mr. Carter's bearing upon this very thing? Let the government own the trusts, removing the men who control, who exploit them, and also the stockholders who draw *unearned* dividends. People should work for what they get—it is not sufficient to put one's name to a slip of paper, then sit back and watch the dollars flow in, while other people are struggling valiantly, using every means in their power to earn a livelihood, and fail."

"Would you have the government seize the trusts, or pay for them?" asked Tressidar, with his inscrutable smile, and Leslie, looking keenly at him, could not tell whether he was serious in his question or whether the smile cloaked half a sneer.

"We would offer to pay for them, we stand for justice," replied Carter tensely. "We want to avoid friction, we want not war but evolution. We stand for inherited civilization, not cannibalism—blood-

shed. Look at the great reforms in the past—the Civil War, for instance. Men of thought saw it coming years before the storm broke; they tried to avert it by offering to pay for the slaves. Just imagine that, to avert the Civil War by paying for the slaves! Of course fanatics on both sides refused. What was the result? The expenditure of a billion of dollars and a million lives. All that should have been avoided—it should have come peacefully through evolution—as these reforms are going to come."

"What is wrong?" Vera Stearns leaned across Burnley and put the question with a pretty puckering of her brows.

The man waited an instant, as though hoping Margaret would answer, and when she did not he said briefly:

"Capitalism!"

"What is the remedy?"

"Socialism!"

"It seems very intricate," sighed the widow, nibbling a bit of cheese. "I thought the main trouble was overproduction."

"So it is, in a sense; that is, the people who are able to buy the production don't want so much of it; and the producers who want it, are forced through a lack of money to go without it. The trusts equalize matters in a small way, a brutal way, such as in the instance of child labor, they are as much a part of the 'System' as the poor

wretched toilers themselves, but under Socialism that would be changed."

"How would it be changed?" Leslie put the question to Margaret.

"By abolishing profits," the woman answered slowly, turning to her guest for confirmation and approval. "We would produce for use, not profit. We would produce far more than we do now, because under a more cultured civilization, the demand would be greater than it is now. But if we found that we were producing, in any one line, more than we could use, we would reduce the attractiveness of labor in that branch and increase it in another. Germany now schools labor along those lines with entirely satisfactory results."

They rose from the table, some of them at least anxious to continue the discussion.

Tressidar was a little bit bored, in fact, he rather disliked seeing Leslie so absorbed in anything other than himself.

As he sat beside her on the same divan upon which he had sat with Vera Stearns some weeks past, his eyes rested thoughtfully on Margaret.

"I wonder whether women divide men into two classes, those they could marry, and those they could not possibly marry. Do they?"

Leslie did not reply instantly. Finally she said:

"I suppose I know what you mean, but the present reference is a little incomprehensible. Margaret is so—so—big and wholly splendid."

"Exactly! She reminds me of some statuesque Grecian priestess who should sit beside a smoking urn all day and unfold to the passing pilgrim the inscrutable decree of the gods. She is the kind of woman one could never get *near,* one who has few longings, consequently few temptations. She would never digress one jot from the straight and uninteresting pathway, and could not condone or even understand a lapse, no matter how great the provocation, in any one else. I could not breathe in such a constantly uplifted atmosphere."

Leslie smiled appreciatively. She was rather surprised, almost disturbed, by Algy's accurate reading of Margaret, and she thought, with a sort of mental gasp, that perhaps he had been as clever in seeing her own little foibles and subterfuges. What a contempt he would have for a woman he could read easily!

"What is the matter?" the Englishman asked, as Leslie rose suddenly and walked toward the piano, "have I offended you by my frank criticism of your friend?"

"Not in the least. I only feel my pitiful inability to cope with any one so clever—that's all."

"I never quite know whether you are joking or not," complained Algy.

"I don't mean you to," laughed the girl. "Listen while I quote you something:

" 'The woman who knows, and knows she knows —she is wise, follow her.

" 'The woman who knows not, and knows not she knows not, she is foolish, shun her.

" 'The woman who knows not, and knows she knows not, she is childish, teach her.

" 'The woman who knows, and knows not she knows, she is asleep, wake her.' "

CHAPTER XII.

Walter Bryce was quietly married, and after a reasonable honeymoon brought his child bride home for his aunts to take care of. They did not wholly discourage the idea of his marriage, not knowing all of the facts in connection with that episode, and hoped, with wistful longing, that this was the one thing needed to make Walter "settle down." The father of Mrs. Bryce had more worldly views, in fact, with brutal frankness, which rather hurt the young man's befuddled sensibilities, he made himself amply clear, that Bryce would marry his daughter and lend a respectability, combatible with his exalted position as "wardheeler," or *he* would know the reason why!

Poor little Clara Bryce, from the first, had pity meted out to her. Every one "poored" her, every one hoped for the best, but instinctively looked for the worst. She adored Walter with that utter abandonment and lavishness of demonstration indicative of the frugal intellect, which eventually irritated even him. When he left her in the evenings, too satiated with her caresses to even tolerate her presence at the theatre, Aunt Polly and Aunt Libby sang his praises with her; when he came

home in a maudlin state of imbecility, he easily persuaded her that he had dined and wined rather less sumptuously than the other members of the party—those things were among the privileges which "gentlemen of birth and fashion" enjoy. Alas for little Mrs. Bryce, these privileges were enjoyed with monotonous frequency by her husband of birth and fashion. When Walter married, the aunts made another inroad upon their little bank account, in order that his wife might share whatever comforts and luxuries he did. Needless to say, Clara forever remained in ignorance of the provision made for her.

Since the night of Vera Stearns' reception Bryce had frequently dined with Tressidar, though to do the latter justice, he vowed after each time *this* would surely be the last. As at the beginning of their acquaintance, Algy always felt a contempt and loathing for this puppy; yet because he rather inclined to move along the line of the least resistance, he allowed himself to be persuaded to spend the first hour with Walter Bryce. After that it was *he* who prolonged the night of revelry.

It was after an evening spent in this fashion, early in May, that Algy found himself totally unable, at two o'clock, to keep an appointment with Leslie.

This was the second time lately he had failed her, the first being a morning ride in the park, some two weeks before. It seemed a cruel jest of Fate that she and Walter should want him at the same

time, and while Algy found himself more and more ready to answer to the feminine call, he could not withstand the old desire. At least, he did not care to resist it, that is the way he put the matter to himself, he did not want to see Leslie so much—enough to refuse to spend an evening now and again with Bryce.

For his seeing Leslie had gradually grown to be a daily occurrence. Perhaps for days he did not see her alone, but in some way they met. Often Mrs. Stearns invited him there, perhaps Miss Davies asked him to her home, frequently Burnley, Scott, or some of the men brought them together, and when no one else did, Leslie herself always had a little jaunt to suggest. And if the idea itself did not wholly appeal to him at first, he soon forgot his lack of enthusiasm in the exhilaration of the girl's presence.

Too stupid, by far, to realize more than his utter inability to rise, Tressidar mentally shrugged his shoulders and wondered how she would "take it." Then he dropped off to sleep again, and forgot a thumping headache, a pair of burning eyeballs, a much-enlarged and very dry tongue, a gently rocking bed, and—a pair of reproachful, sorrow-laden hazel eyes.

Although Leslie had not been present when Burnley and Vera Stearns made up the party, she understood that six of them were to take a trip up the Hudson, and, of course, Tressidar was invited. He had seemed to fit into their crowd quite natur-

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ally, and attained a sort of familiar footing among them, sliding easily and gracefully into the vacant place left by Albert Matheson, without years or months of preliminary acquaintance.

As two o'clock struck and Tressidar had not come, Leslie allowed herself a moment's honest thought and introspection. A peculiar lassitude stole over her as she grew assured that he was not coming, which was not entirely due to a longing for his presence.

There had been so many instances of Tressidar's lack of punctuality that one more or less did not matter, except that some day had to be a reckoning day.

Naturally, a slight of any kind to her was hard to bear. A girl who has become accustomed to the deference, homage, and adoration of men has a right to look for, at least, an observance of the fundamental social laws. But to these Algy seemed oblivious—that is, he always apologized for his non-observance of them—and repeated the offense. Finally it became a matter of gigantic moment, *to hold him* to his word. And a great question arose in her mind, why did he not keep his engagements? Was it because he was bored? Hardly! No one, not even Tressidar, could feign constant pleasure in her society, and this he surely felt, acted, and finally acknowledged.

Perhaps he felt himself unable to keep pace with the generous spendthrifts, for all of the men Leslie knew intimately were men of means, but that

could hardly be the reason—even they were not as lavish as Tressidar. Could it be another woman? Did *she* know how or where he spent all those other hours?

"Do you believe that a man of birth and education can really love a woman who is his inferior?" Algy had asked her one day, apropos of nothing apparently.

"I am not sure," she had answered. "Do you mean—marry her?"

"Yes, marry her. Think of the men who often marry their housekeepers or their trained nurses, to go a step higher. Why do you suppose they do it?"

Leslie laughed a little. "I think you must be trying to tease, or perhaps pave the way for a joke, aren't you? That is almost too silly a question to answer!"

"Well, be silly for once and answer it! I know that you think like I do, that there is no love in a case of that kind," he paused for a moment, "don't you?"

Leslie smiled into his eyes.

"In the housekeeper's case, perhaps not, though I can imagine even that. It is the womanly woman who makes the appeal, and usually the womanly woman and the woman of keen intellect are not the same person, are they?"

"Sometimes," answered Algy, looking straight at Leslie. "Yes, sometimes," he repeated.

"Not usually, I said; let me emphasize *usually!*

In the case of the trained nurse, I think often an element of gratitude is at the bottom of what men mistake for love. Beside that, their lazy natures are fostered, they are so efficiently taken care of," she laughed. "Don't you remember that Mark Twain said the only times he was ever supremely happy were when he got his Oxford degree and when he had the measles? Men are like that—they like making a sensation, and nurses are trained to humor idiotic whims, don't you think, which would be pooh-poohed in a married man's home by his wife, no matter how loving she was. The patient in question therefore probably thinks to himself that this white-capped angel is his affinity, he lies in bed and revels in the idea that he is to be catered to and taken care of this way for years to come."

"Well?"

"Well, he *usually* isn't."

"Yes, but does he *love* her?" repeated Algy insistently, hoping to see the pink creep into Leslie's cheeks, as it generally did during any intimate discussion regarding love.

"Of course not," she had answered. "In fact, I sometimes ask myself do men ever *love* women?"

She said the words slowly, looking past Algy out into the smoky sky. She had seemed to follow her thoughts literally, leaving him alone, behind her.

For an instant neither spoke, then Leslie was

aroused by a subtle something in his voice as he asked the question:

"Do you *make* us love you?"

She chose to misunderstand him.

"I should say there is proof enough of that. Look at the actresses who make men love them, who make men break good wives' hearts, and who cause financial ruin, as well, to hundreds of homes."

"Now we are getting to the point," replied Algy, "and I refer to my question once more, do men love women who are not their equals?"

"But some of these women *are* not only equals, but superiors," objected Leslie; she felt an undercurrent of something undefinable in all of Tressidar's serious discussions, he seemed to enter into things so coolly, with so little heart—just head, that she put a strict curb on herself for fear that, impulsively, she would be trapped into an admission, she would afterward regret. In other words, Leslie always tried, intuitively or otherwise, to see Algy's point long before he had led her up to it.

"Seldom," contradicted the man. "Their education is only in their own line, and their sole aim in life is to be admired and kow-towed to."

"I have known several actresses——" began Leslie.

"So, by George, have I!"

"However, the ones I have known and the ones you have known would be different," the girl said, in a tone which implied that it was only natural that Tressidar should chose the chorus girls as the

evening's diversion, and that she should make a friend of the star, a woman whom she could invite to her home.

And Algy, taken off his guard by the positive manner in which she spoke of, and accepted this statement which was a fact, answered:

"Yes, probably."

"I should like to have seen you during the throes of your first *grande passion,*" she continued, speaking lightly. "You doubtless followed the pantomime girls about like faithful Fido. Have you forgotten?"

"By no means," laughed the other. "In fact, I can't remember the time when some actress has not interested me."

"Not *now!*" Leslie pretended to be incredulous. "Not now, when you realize how transient the glitter is."

"Well, the clever girls, don't let you see that it is transient," admitted Tressidar. "Of course they haven't diamond butterflies attached to tartan skirts, and the pink kid slippers are only for the footlights—but they are an awfully jolly lot, most of them."

"I suppose the English girls are of a better class than ours," Leslie mused aloud.

And again her apparent lack of curiosity, her air of simply continuing a conversation misled Tressidar.

"Oh, I have met some very attractive girls out here, too."

"Really?" The tone might have been his own for indifference.

"Yes, a week or so ago I met some of the Florodora company, had supper with them, in fact." He stopped, a little confused, remembering that it was Bryce who took him out that evening, and that the following morning he had been unable to ride with Leslie.

But she, noticing his hesitation, construed it differently, and thinking of that conversation now, a burning blush dyed her face. How much, after all, did she know of any of the men she called her friends? Vera Stearns had always been her authority in the old days—telling her what men she should know—and although too wise in this world's wickedness to look for absolute morality in a man, Leslie had never felt it *matter* before.

Just now the thought that Tressidar might be dividing his attention between her and another woman, a member of the Florodora or any other company, stung Leslie into bitter shame. She repeated to herself the thing she had thought so often of late, that he was *carelessly* attentive to her. He neither allowed their acquaintance to progress on a basis of friendship, nor did he let it culminate in anything else. At any rate, he was not coming. What was he doing?"

"Don," Leslie called through the 'phone, "can you come for me?"

"Why, I thought——" began Crowley, then stopped. "Of course I can, only won't it save time

for you to meet us downtown? I am a little late myself, and thought, of course, every one else had started."

"I am just ready now," said Leslie, "and will take the subway."

They met some moments later.

The girl's lack of enthusiasm puzzled Crowley a little.

"Have you a headache?" he asked, in a man's usual way.

"Why, no."

"Don't you *want* to go?"

"Oh, yes," Leslie answered quickly, put upon her guard by Don's question. "Yes, indeed, I shall love it! Is Margaret going?"

Crowley shook his head.

"She is engaged with some bomb manufacturer or otherwise explosive gentleman, interested in the noble scheme of mankind's betterment, so we are a girl short. It is just as well that Tressidar can't come."

It was on the tip of Leslie's tongue to ask Don why he couldn't come, but fearing that he only judged such was the case, by his non-appearance with her, she merely answered:

"Just as well!"

CHAPTER XIII.

Vera Stearns moved to her country house about the middle of June. For the last two or three years Leslie had always gone down with her to help her, Vera insisting that she was under the doctor's orders not to exert or overwork herself.

"A totally unnecessary command," Vera assured her friends, frankly, "but then he has only known me since childhood!"

However, this year Leslie pleaded an urgent necessity for staying in town: the Newsboys' Club, the Fresh Air Fund, the Playgrounds, and many other charities in which she took an active interest kept her, so she said. Vera was accustomed to acquiescing without argument, so she went to Deschenes alone for two weeks. Then the house, being in it's gala dress, spread welcoming arms to "the crowd."

The night they all arrived Burnley announced that he was going to give "a party."

"You are all invited," he said grandiloquently, "including Vera, there! I have always prided myself upon my democratic ideas."

In the same spirit every one thanked him, except Angelique Brabazon, and perhaps Herbert Carter,

who could not withstand Vera's urgent request to come down at least for the week-end.

"What will Mr. Burnley do?" asked Angelique of Leslie seriously.

"Nothing," answered the other, smiling. "Probably order the servants around, and us, too, for that matter, mixing up the places at the table, and perhaps pair us off the way we don't want to go—all except himself and Vera."

"But why do he say he is to mek ze party?" asked the French girl, mystified.

"Just a whim," answered Leslie, "a mere fancy, a jest—une drolerie—what you will."

"Mon Dieu, what jokes!" sighed Angelique.

George Burnley had a surprise in store for the guests, however, in fact it was something of a surprise to his hostess; he announced his engagement to her, and presented her with a most ravishing Princess ring.

For the first time since the old schooldays Vera succumbed to a transient and fleeting embarrassment.

"Vera asked me to tell you to-night," volunteered Burnley, with a fatuous look at his fiancée. "I had not intended to commit myself so soon, but once having become entangled (my fascinations have proven too strong for her to resist) she has 'hooked me.' Gentlemen, be warned!"

Congratulations were enthusiastic and sincere. To Angelique's dramatic mind, the whole affair smacked of delightful romance.

Tom Edge had glimmerings of a repetition of the occurrence in which the principals were different, Margaret Crowley and Mr. Carter were ponderously pleased, and Leslie Loring's heart fairly ached with the fulness of its joy for her friends. Tressidar and Don had alike become unfathomable, and she had about given up struggling with a tiresome problem.

"Wasn't my party a success?" George asked her, after dinner. He was beaming like a boy of twenty.

"A huge, vast, prodigious, large, immense, gigantic, colossal, Success," Leslie answered gayly. "The Success of the Season."

"Oh, wait," interrupted the man darkly. "That is the point which worries me. I don't *know* that it will be the success of the season."

Angelique, Tom, and Tressidar had joined them.

"What?" asked Algy.

Burnley shook his head gloomily.

"I was telling Leslie that this brilliant idea of mine may not turn to my own advantage. You see," he explained, with ridiculous gestures, "you see, instead of punctuating the summer with dramatic competitions, as we have done in years gone by, I conceived the idea of letting engagements take their place. I know the announcement of mine took you all completely by surprise"—Angelique laughed delightedly—"but then you scarcely realize what a designing, insatiable octopus Vera is."

"Shame," jeered Leslie.

"Kindly refrain from interrupting," haughtily remarked Burnley. "Now, as each engagement is announced, it will receive high marks in proportion to the surprise it creates, and at the end of the season the couple with the highest mark may expect——"

"A prize," suggested Tom Edge.

"——to join Vera and her husband in Mentone about Christmas time. *Of course,*" he continued blandly, "of course we have a little chart, as it were, pairing off the couples, in such a manner as to stimulate their ambition to enter this contest; for instance," his eyes wandered vaguely around the group, at last meeting those of Angelique who did not exactly know how much of this was serious and how much jest. Catching her glance, he slowly but intelligently transferred his look to Tom, who, half expecting it, had moved behind Tressidar.

They all were obliged to laugh, though Leslie tried to be stern, and mumbled, "Beast!"

"Or," Burnley went on oblivious, apparently, to the epithet flung at him, "or——"

Don Crowley sat with his back to them, talking to Elsie Davies, and was therefore unconscious of the calculating scrutiny of George's glance. This travelled slowly back to Leslie, who, with scarlet cheeks was trying to make conversation. Suddenly a change occurred to Burnley, a change in his program, for he fixed Tressidar with a stern, relentless eye, raised his brows questioningly, and finally nodded to himself with immense satisfaction.

Leslie had, in the meantime, crossed the room to Vera, and was arranging for the coming week's festivities.

Since the day Tressidar had failed her, she had not seen him very often. His attitude, as usual, puzzled her, and the exact standing she should take in the matter was something of a problem, too.

If she had been wholly or even mildly disinterested she would have listened politely to his apology and never allowed him the same footing again. Unfortunately she was tremendously interested, and the small, insistent voice of her heart called out against the big gruff voice of her reason, urging her to give him another chance.

Vera had been most indignant at his disappointing them, and vowed that nothing short of the man's death, or at least a stroke of paralysis, would induce her to reinstall him in her favor. For an instant Leslie's heart stood still. If Vera really meant this, Tressidar would not be included among the guests for her house party. An impulse was strong to plead for him, then two things intervened, her pride and her reason. Not even Vera should know that it mattered, that her head and heart ached on account of this indifferent Englishman who evidently felt himself superior enough to treat her as he pleased. Her reason argued that pleading his cause would not win the point.

"I don't believe he is worth considering, Vera," Leslie said indifferently. "You must have noticed how we urge him to join us, and when he does not

care to come he simply leaves us in the lurch at the last moment, and goes his own sweet way. I call him a decided boor."

"A boor," shrieked Mrs. Stearns, "a boor! Why, girl, you are crazy!"

"Well, he has no manners," insisted Leslie. "A person with bad manners is a boor, isn't he?"

"Why, he has the most—*the most*— charming manners of any man I have ever known," replied the widow positively, "and you know it. I think you are very exacting."

The girl shrugged her shoulders. She could hardly keep from laughing. "I certainly am," she assented, "if expecting a man to keep an engagement with me is a test."

"He was ill," objected the other, "and explained that he overslept himself until too late to telephone. You know that."

"Sounds fishy," commented Vera's friend, with another shrug. "I know he won't be an addition to the houseparty," she continued, aghast at her own duplicity and boldness.

"Addition," fairly screamed the other. "Why, I should not consider the party at all but for him."

"You are going to ask him, then?" questioned Leslie, with well-feigned astonishment.

Vera's contempt was too great for words.

"Well, I should think George would be jealous," suggested Leslie at last.

"He is," laughed the other, "and I know some

one else who is, too." Her eyes had a wicked twinkle.

"Who?"

"I know something I won't tell," sang Vera, rushing off to answer the telephone. "His name begins with D."

Tressidar had certainly seemed very glad to accept the invitation. He got his riding clothes pressed, he laid in a supply of flannels, and purchased himself a tennis racket and other accessories necessary to a summer's outing. Crowley, George Burnley, and Tom Edge were to take a month's holiday and form "the family," with Angelique, Leslie, Elsie Davies, and Vera. Carter, young Scott, and the Count were listed among week-end guests and the summer promised to be very enjoyable.

The first evening at Deschenes was spent on the veranda *en famille.* The moon rose in golden splendor over the magnificent oaks, which gave the place its name, making the lawn wave with an unreality, a mystery of shadows, which hushed the merry crowd into silence.

Tom Edge moved his chair a shade nearer Angelique. Every one seemed to gravitate to some one else or to wish to. "Will you sing?" he asked softly.

"Me? What? Oh, no, I do not sing without ze pian-o. It ess si stupide, n'est ce-pas? But Leslie, zere—— Ah, you know how she mek us cry wis ze ban-jo, is it not, Vera?"

"Oh, do, Leslie, *please!*" There was a babel of entreaty for an instant.

Then Leslie rose slowly. "Don't make such a fuss," she complained almost petulantly, "you seem to be disturbing even the moonbeams. Of course I'll sing, if you like."

In the doorway she paused. "You want the banjo, Angelique—why not the guitar?"

"Regarde," cried Mlle. Brabazon dramatically, "she stan lak dat, all in white, ze red rose at her breast, it look black, sad, an' of ze broken heart—so soft—so what you call—*appeal*—not gay, *abandon*, lak ze Spanish of ze guitar!"

"Bravo!" Tressidar clapped his hands lightly. "Mademoiselle is right, Miss Loring; let me help you find the banjo."

"There is nothing you can't do," he continued, as they passed into the music room, "is there?"

Leslie turned to him without smiling, and let him look long into her uplifted face, into her deep, gray eyes.

"I don't know," she answered slowly. "I am going to find out."

The man caught his breath sharply, instinctively he knew that, in some way, she referred to him; she appealed to him as never before, and, standing there in the moonlit room, he longed to crush her to him, to feel her breath on his cheek, to put his mouth upon hers, hard, until she struggled in his arms, until she murmured through her kiss-bound lips, "You are hurting me!"

Margaret Crowley's voice broke the spell. "Bring a scarf for me, please, Leslie," she called.

Tressidar let the girl go out on the verandah alone, he pleaded the excuse of going upstairs for more cigarettes. In reality he wanted a drink to steady himself. Never in all his woman-spattered life had he so nearly lost himself, that is, at a time when he had not meant to. At this rate he could not hold himself in check much longer.

When he joined the others Leslie was sitting on the floor with her banjo close against the blood-red rose, and she was singing this song:

I built a temple in my heart,
  Where moth and rust can never come,
A temple swept and kept apart,
  To make my soul a home.

And round about the doors of it,
  Hang garlands which forever last,
Which gathered once can never fade—
  The Roses of the Past.

He could not tell what made the song so sad, he could not explain why the song affected him so strangely, what magic was in the singer's voice—he only knew that a great sob rose in his throat, an overwhelming regret surged over him for things shrouded by the veil of time. An agony of longing impelled him to be the man he knew she would have him be; the desire of a half an hour ago was still strong in him—he wanted her.

"Elsie," cried Leslie, throwing the banjo aside; "Elsie Davies, don't you *dare* to cry!"

"Oh, Leslie, it is so sad," half sobbed the other, "and it reminds me of poor old Mathie. How could you sing it to-night?"

There was silence for a few minutes, then Leslie whispered:

"I think he likes to hear it."

In that instant Tressidar's heart burned with a blind, unreasoning jealousy, even of the memory of Albert Matheson. "I *am* going in for the heiress," he said to himself, "and I am going to play a winning game."

CHAPTER XIV.

The days sped by with alarming rapidity. Half of the month was gone, and as Burnley naively put it, the contest was still open to competitors. Every night, at dinner, he would look askance at each member of the party, and raise an interrogative eyebrow.

"No luck at all," he would say despondently. "I think, my dear Vera, that you are not a very *savante* hostess."

The Count who was one of the party this night, looked keenly interested. "I want ze prize," he said, with about as much coquetry as his bird-like self could assume. "I want ze prize! I should say it ess plain to be seen, that in each of dese charming young ladies, Mrs. Stearns has given us ze chance of a prize."

Leslie, who was a bit tired of the monotonous jest, spoke conversationally:

"They say that the getting of a thing is purely a matter of desire, that if one wants a thing badly enough, one can have it. I rather think I should get a thing I wanted very much."

Algy, who was sitting beside her, put his serviette to his lips.

"Oh, deah," he simpered foolishly, in a shrill falsetto. "Oh, deah, girls, I wonder if she means me!"

Every one laughed, and Leslie felt that she must make good, so, turning cold eyes of scrutiny upon her neighbour, she answered:

"I thought I had effectually cloaked you under the guise of a *Thing*. If you will persist in allowing your personality to intrude itself upon my conversation, you must take the consequences. A *Thing* is far worse than a 'person,' or even a 'party.'" And she turned her back upon him.

Tressidar extracted a notebook from his pocket, tore out a leaf, and wrote something upon it. Then beckoning the butler, he said in an unnecessarily loud voice, "Deliver that at once to Miss Loring."

The waiter handed the tray to Leslie who read the words:

"Return at once, all is forgiven. They say the chee-ild is in London.

"PARENTS."

Of course she laughed, with the keen appreciation of one who recognizes greater ability in a loved one, than is possessed by oneself. Algy was serious or frivolous just as her moods dictated, only it seemed to her that he was just a little more so than she ever was.

Tom Edge rose shyly from his chair.

"I believe this is my party, to-night," he said, smiling at Angelique.

"Eh? What?" Burnley held his glass poised in

midair. "Has the young idea begun to shoot?" he asked incredulously. "Is it possible that my meagre little jest has brought forth results?"

A glance at Angelique's face answered the question—and much merriment ensued.

"There are only a few of us left," suggested the Count to Leslie, as they left the table. "Will you walk with me through the rose garden, by moonlight?"

"Except that there is no rose garden and there is no moon, your invitation is delightful, and is accepted," murmured the girl.

"That being the case, stroll with *me* on the south pike," begged Tressidar.

"This popularity will turn her head, gentlemen," warned Vera, coming up behind them; "remember she is an heiress and not accustomed to masculine attention."

Tressidar winced. In spite of all this badinage he had decided to ask Leslie to marry him before leaving Deschenes, and it was a positive proof of his love for her, that he felt his inability to speak the committing words. He read in this hesitancy —embarrassment, a depth of sentiment, inexperienced in any previous attachment. It was not altogether that, however. It was an uncertainty as to the exact state of Leslie's feeling for him. Every few days his point of view changed; first he fancied she cared, then, as on the day he asked permission to hold her hands, she caused him to veer to the opposite opinion. He compared her manner toward

him with that toward Crowley or the Count, whom he instinctively detested, and could not honestly discern much difference. He had proven to himself that life without whiskey was bearable, for since being at Deschene he had only sipped modestly of whatever liquid refreshment was offered save once, and altogether in spite of a very limited allowance owing to Sir Anthony's protracted displeasure, Tressidar gazed upon a rather attractive outlook.

Mrs. Stearns' allusion to Leslie's finances, under the circumstances, grated uncomfortably, and again he seemed balked upon the threshold of an auspicious opening.

"Come outside with *me*," the Count was saying earnestly, "we must continue our discussion about that book, you know."

"Miss Loring has already promised me this hour after dinner dedicated to strolls and confidences. Discussions of books must wait a more practical season."

"Is it so?" the Count asked, turning to Leslie, visibly unwilling to be dismissed by the Englishman. And Leslie not wishing to make things uncomfortable, evaded the question slightly, and said:

"Yes, I am going for a walk with Mr. Tressidar."

"That was very good of you," Algy began, when the two had passed beyond the Count's sinister glance. "I don't like that fellow."

"I do."

"All the more reason for me to repeat, with emphasis, I don't like the fellow."

"How prejudiced! Isn't that sunset glorious?"

"That's not the sunset, it is merely the reflection. Accuracy is out of your line, isn't it?"

"I can take lessons from Margaret," murmured Leslie meekly.

"Heaven forbid," ejaculated her companion fervently. "You couldn't be improved"—he scrutinized her carefully—"unless—unless," he faltered, seeing laughter in her eyes, "you had dark hair."

"Oh," she cried indignantly. "Oh, you horrid, English boy! *My* hair, all my own, not a peroxide strand, and you would like it black! I don't care for you."

"How amusing you look, angry," teased the man.

"I am not angry," Leslie returned instantly, "I am appalled at your lack of artistic taste. Why, with black hair, do you know that I am not unlike Angelique Brabazon."

"Impossible!"

"It's true! And according to photographs I look even more like her elder sister—who by the way has gone on the stage, and sails in a few days. Perhaps that is why little Thomas was precipitous (the baby) for Angelique must leave to-morrow or the day after, to bid her bon voyage. She goes to France, I believe."

Their conversation drifted along personal lines, Tressidar endeavoring valiantly to pave the way for himself. He wondered anxiously whether or

not Leslie was conscious of his nervousness, and inwardly cursed himself for a mawkish fool.

"Do you remember our conversation about men marrying their inferiors?" he asked presently.

"Perfectly," answered the girl. "We never arrived at a very satisfactory conclusion, did we?"

"I think not, but that was your fault for switching me off to actresses. I want to go back to that subject and ask you about something you said."

"Well?"

"You said you wondered whether men ever *loved* women, did you not?"

"I believe so."

"Well, what did you mean by that?"

"I think I meant something like this: do men ever give as much as they get? Do you realize what a woman sacrifices when she loves? It is not an episode with her—it is her life. Do you know Mrs. Browning's poem on that theme?"

"No, but never mind Mrs. Browning, just now; I want to hear Miss Loring—Leslie—on that theme."

Had the name slipped out inadvertantly, or had it even been spoken naturally, there would not have been that deep significance which made Leslie tremble. The hesitation alone was potent, added to that the tone, caressing, tender, conveyed more than a mad declaration would have done.

So Leslie, not being quite sure of herself, drew in her sails.

"Oh, I can't pit myself against Mrs. Browning," she said, turning back toward the house.

"Don't go, yet," urged Algy, taking a step forward but not touching her. "Tell me, do you think *you* have a large capacity for loving?"

"How material that sounds," she laughed, "something like a gaping cavern, into which one throws, lonely young creatures, pining for some one to love them."

"Oh, be serious, Leslie—I intend to call you Leslie, now, do you mind?" Then, without waiting for an answer, he continued, "Do you think you could love some one who was your inferior, who was not really fit to touch you, who could bring you nothing but a properly repentant heart, and a desire to prove worthy of you?"

And because Leslie feared that he would find her too easy a quarry, she encased herself in the strongest armour through which passion has to pierce—humor.

"Do you think you could love like that?"

"Without the *daddow* of a *shout!*" she answered solemnly.

In spite of the glorious sunset, toward daybreak menacing clouds rolled across the sky and sheets of lightning shot luridly against an inky back ground. The guests had all retired—at least, they had gone to their rooms quite early—the intense sultriness being most trying. Leslie slept soundly, dreaming of the Count's words to Tressidar and herself when they came back to the verandah. She

saw again his triumphant manner after leading the conversation to the proper point, as he said:

"I fancy you haf missed dose congenial little suppers at Sherry's. Eh, mon ami?"

"What suppers?" asked Vera.

"Ah, but Tressidar, here, knows ze poetry of food!" The Count raised reverend hands to the God of Gluttony, and continued rapidly, "twas ze night of ze day when you haf invite me here, dear lady, I join my frien' Tressidar and Bryce—the young—how do you say—honeymoon, with such piquante ladies of the Florodora, at Sherry's. Me, I was not of ze party, but my good frien', here, he see my desolation and he say, another chair for ze Count, garçon, and another one for the lady—for surely the Floradora can spare another lady, eh Fanchette? he say, turning to Mademoiselle. An', oh, ze supper, Madame! It remin' me of a petite café at my home—in ze beloved Paris." The dream became confused, Tressidar and the Count seemed to be struggling over an object lying on the floor, and when she, unnoticed by them, stooped to pick it up, she found it was a black wig. There was a great noise in the restaurant, a loud booming, then all the lights flared up with dazzling brilliance, and she awoke.

Something had happened, but for a moment she was too stupid to realize what it was. Then, suddenly, the truth dawned upon her—the house had been struck by lightning and was burning.

"Cecile!" she called, before remembering that

the servants' quarters were in an entirely different part of the house. The thunder was deafening and the roar of the wind drowned every other sound.

Hurriedly putting on her nearest garment, Leslie opened the door and started through the smoke-filled corridor.

"Vera! Don!" she screamed, "the house is on fire—Fire!"

A man's voice answered:

"Where are you?"

"Here," Leslie called, tearing at the kid curlers which framed her face. "Go back to the others at once, they may be choked or asleep! Rouse every one as you go! I am all right."

It was Tressidar.

"I am a fright," she thought, panic-stricken. "If he ever sees me *now*——" she rushed into her room, all sense of confusion gone, and slipped into a few articles of clothing, with wonderful rapidity. She laughed excitedly to herself as she ran the comb through her hair and pinned it back with a large gold barette, and she slipped her orange stick into the pocket of her kimona, before thinking of what few valuables she wished to take. The smoke blinded and choked her, though as yet no flames were visible, and it was not until Tressidar returned that she knew where the others were.

"Come," commanded the man, taking her forcibly in his arms, "you will strangle."

"If the rain would only come," she gasped. "I know I have forgotten something important."

"Your manicure set," suggested Algy, groping his way down the stairs.

Vera pounced on them as they reached the grounds and shook Leslie.

"Where have you *been?*" she demanded angrily, "I have been frantic, thinking perhaps you were hurt."

"She was collecting her things," said Algy, as in commendation of such presence of mind. "Now I am going to help. Are the servants all out?" he called over his shoulder.

"I think so," shouted Vera between her hands, "Morton will see to them."

"We should help," said Leslie, with her eyes on the roof. "I can pump at any rate, while the men carry buckets up and down."

The flames had not made appalling headway, although the wind was very high. Don Crowley had carried several pieces of hose to the roof the instant the house was struck, and he and Burnley worked like demons. But the smoke was blinding, choking in its density.

The forms of the men on the roof silhouetted against the fitful flames, looked weird and unreal. Every now and then their shouts of warning or command could be heard by the watchers below. But for the most part the scene was pantomimic, with only the deafening crashes of thunder, and shrieking of wind to off-set the silence.

Vera was pluckiness itself.

"Let the house go," she shouted a dozen times futilely, "I want you to come down here."

The servants were moving out everything get-at-able, and two of the men had even ventured on the second floor, but were driven back. With a change in the wind the fire maliciously spread, running swiftly down the eaves of the house.

"It is no use," cried Vera, again. "George, don't you hear me, come down!"

Suddenly Angelique, who had been sobbing childishly, with her head against Elsie Davies, uttered a wild shriek, and flung up her hands.

"Mon Dieu," she cried, *"J'ai oubliée ma bague d'or!"* then promptly had hysterics.

Leslie shook her roughly, "Stop that, and tell me where you put it," she demanded, speaking rapidly in French.

Incoherently Angelique poured forth a volume of words, but Leslie gathered some information from the disjointed sentences. It seemed that Tom had given her a ring of his own, which was much too large, and the girl, sentimentally put it under her pillow. When Vera, warned by Burnley, that the house had been struck, sent Tressidar to tell her, she flew excitedly to the door and downstairs, precisely as she had leapt from her bed.

Elsie Davies and Margaret had made more thoughtful provision for themselves, so that they were able to lend her clothes after they arrived upon the scene. Don Crowley, Burnley, and Tom Edge, were the first on the roof. The Count

undertook to rouse the servants and Tressidar selfishly, insisted upon "helping Leslie."

"She doesn't need any more help," Burnley had called, almost angrily. "Stay here, and get a blanket."

"Be back directly," called the Englishman, swinging over the side of the roof with monkey-like agility.

As a matter of fact, he hardly realized what he was doing. Leslie's yielding form held so close against his own had caused him such an intensity of emotion as he had never known. He had passed through so many emotions, indeed, in such a short time, that he was almost irresponsible for his actions. First his firm determination to ask the girl to marry him, her parrying of him, his blinding rage at the Count's poor scheme for revenge, his excitement when the alarm was given, and again Leslie, Leslie, always Leslie.

"Mr. Tressidar," cried Vera Stearns, as he jumped from a low-hanging branch to the ground, "quick, Leslie has gone into the house—into Angie's room. We could not prevent her," she called after him, as with an oath he bounded past the now terrified women, up the steps of the verandah, where the flames were making headway.

"Leslie," he shouted, "Leslie!"

A flash of lightning illumined the stairway partially, that is Algy saw the thick smoke which had settled so densely over everything—in the blackness of a moment ago, he had only felt it.

"Leslie," he coughed; "answer me!"

From the room next Vera's which Angelique had occupied, an object crawled on all fours and touched the man's knees, weakly.

Swiftly he stooped and gathered the girl in his arms, burying his face in the tangled masses of her hair.

"Are you hurt?" he breathed, stumbling down the stairs.

She did not answer, but let her head fall back against his breast, one arm hung loosely across his shoulders, and he thought she had fainted. But as he reached the door, she moved slightly in his arms, and gasped:

"Thank God, there is the rain!"

Algy leaned panting against one of the pillars of the verandah, breathing, it seemed, to him for the first time in weeks. The wind had changed and was blowing the smoke in clouds away from them, toward the buildings in the rear of the house.

"Put me down," whispered Leslie.

"I love you," murmured the man, seeking her lips. "Kiss me, darling, kiss me!"

The girl moved her head restlessly and made a feeble struggle. It was sufficient.

"Don't move away from me!" Algy cried hoarsely. "You can't—you can't ever get away from me again. God, how I have wanted you," he went on his lips full on hers. "How I want you, want you!"

She lay passive, stunned by his vehemence, his

passion. Was this the moment of which she had dreamed?

"Speak to me, dearest," he was pleading, "tell me that you love me."

Out of the darkness a form emerged, and the Count's voice sounded close at hand.

"Ah, mes amis, you are here," he said suavely. "Madame has sent me to fin' you, but I see you are quite safe, so au revoir," he waved his hand airily —though they did not see—and was gone.

"Come," said Leslie, "I must go to Angelique—they will all be worried."

"Here is your ring, cherie—now hush, everybody. I am not hurt, and Mr. Tressidar may pride himself upon a noble deed of heroism in saving——"

"The heiress," interposed the Count, with a clever imitation of a laugh.

"The heiress," repeated Leslie slowly, "from the hungry flames."

"Ah, mon Dieu, but you are une ange, mignon," cried Angelique through tears. "How can I ever thank you?"

"Here are your beads, too, and I wanted to bring you some clothes, but my breath gave out."

"The idea! Que vous etes stupide, Leslie! However," she said, casting a regretful look in the direction of the house from their temporary quarters, "I wish I had my beaut-iful 'at, ze one wis all ze feazhers—the feazhers of ze 'usband of ze 'en!"

CHAPTER XV.

Taking all in all, the damage done to Deschenes was comparatively slight. Of course, repairs had to be made at once, so the house party was obliged to dissolve. Angelique sailed from Quebec with her sister Celeste for Havre in that week, Elsie Davies went to friends on the St. Lawrence, Margaret Crowley and her mother left for the country shortly afterward, and Leslie finally accepted Miss Polly's invitation, given so often through the last month, and decided to spend a fortnight with the Bryces. The Crowleys also wanted her, but instinctively she felt that they would not ask Tressidar, and she wanted to follow up the advantage gained while at Vera Stearns'.

On the morning after the fire she had not seen him alone, for naturally there was great confusion about the place, people driving over from all directions to see the result of the fire and offer assistance, the guests leaving as they got their belongings sorted, and Vera between laughter and tears urging them to stay and help shingle the roof, then in the next breath begging them to go and organize a benefit for her, sending her daily hampers from some modest "Chop House."

Leslie left with the Crowleys, and Tressidar was to come up on a later train with George Burnley. The Count had gone earlier with Tom and Angelique.

Arrived at the Bryce's Leslie tried to forget herself and her own affairs, and devote her entire time and attention to the dear old ladies of whom she was so fond.

Their main topic of conversation was as usual Walter; it was tragic to hear their loving excuses for him. Miss Polly would tell Leslie how improved the dear boy was, how his marriage had reformed him; ten minutes afterward Miss Libby would tell her how hard it must be for a boy of Walter's restless, convivial temperament to settle down, and how unfortunate it was that Clara was already in too delicate a condition to go out a great deal with him.

"It may be the making of him, though," she added hopefully, "a child has such a loving, restraining influence."

"I don't care for 'settling down' myself," Leslie answered, smiling; "for a cup of coffee it seems only right and proper, but a person should have a few grounds floating near the surface, in my opinion."

"Well, dear, of course your views are very good, and no doubt quite adequate to fit your needs, but I would like to see Walter break away from those associates who lead him into temptation. You see Clara is easily affected by any—any—excitement"

—she found the word triumphantly—"on his part."

"But the club men don't lead him into temptation," objected Leslie, "Mathie was so careful to warn them."

"Oh, no, dear, the club is a very good thing for Walter, certainly. It seems to be this Englishman who is the cause of his present trouble."

"What Englishman?" Leslie asked the question slowly. She already knew the answer, but felt a morbid longing to hear the name from Miss Libby's innocent lips. Sitting there in the half-darkened library with a piece of fine embroidery in her hand, Leslie raised her eyes to Miss Libby's face, bit off a thread, and smoothed out her work, all before asking.

"What Englishman?"

"Why, *that* Mr. Tressidar," replied the younger Miss Bryce, unconsciously qualifying Algy by "that." "He is a frightful drunkard, my dear, such a harmful companion for our Walter."

It seemed as though two persons sprang into birth in her brain as Leslie listened to Miss Libby's lowered voice. One said tragically, hopelessly: "A drunkard," and the other laughed a tender little note of pity, and said: "A man who drinks a glass of ale at dinner with regularity and with enjoyment would, in Miss Libby's eyes, be—a drunkard."

Suddenly she realized that the little aunt was speaking:

"At first he used to telephone Walter to go out with him, then—then, I am sorry to say, Walter

used to go without being asked. We always know when he is with Tressidar because——" a painful red crept into the delicate cheeks, and she seemed to regret the fulness of her confidence.

"Because he is worse, then?" suggested Leslie.

Miss Libby nodded.

"He usually tells Clara, anyway," she continued, after a pause, "he is never as bad as that other man, he says; and, oh, my dear, sometimes even the women are—are—drunk." Her voice sunk to a whisper, and two tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Dear Miss Libby," cried Leslie, "*don't* think about it so seriously. Walter is only a boy, and—and I am sure Mr. Tressidar will be different after this. I myself will ask him."

Before Miss Libby could protest Clara Bryce entered the room, and the conversation was immediately turned along different channels. It was keen torture, requiring the utmost self-restraint and discipline for Leslie to sit an hour with the two of them and listen to their platitudes and their constant allusions to Walter and his prospects. She had rather expected Algy to send her some word or come to see her during the afternoon or evening, but when he did not make the effort, she accepted an invitation from Count de Vinville—just why she did not even acknowledge to herself. While dressing for dinner she thought over Miss Libby's words, and looked herself squarely, very squarely, in the eye.

"I love Algy Tressidar," she told her own image in the mirror. "There, I have said it! I am going

to marry him, but he is going to want to marry *me*. He does not know that just yet, but I believe he will, if I can only keep him away from other attractions, such as midnight suppers and the ladies of the Florodora."

She knew what kind of a man he was at last; she realized now the reason for all the broken engagements, the reason he was so unenthusiastic about morning jaunts of any kind, for she had seen Clarence Stearns—Vera's husband—often during the last year of his life.

"How could you marry him?" she had asked Vera. "Did you know it?"

"Oh, yes, I knew he drank," she had replied, "but I thought he would want to stop, which was the same thing to me as stopping, and, anyway, I didn't care very much. Father said he was a fine fellow, and I was pleased to think I had the catch of that season and many other seasons at my beck and call. I'm not sorry," she had added.

But Vera was so different. Alike incapable of any great emotion—love, hate, sorrow—of course it did not matter. Naturally she did not prefer to have Mr. Stearns come into the drawing-room in such a condition as Walter Bryce had the night of her reception, but if he did there was always some one on whom she could depend to help her make the best of it, and, at least, the man was a gentleman.

Finally, after concentrated thought and a wavering once or twice, Leslie decided that any one of

Tressidar's make-up could stop if he had the desire, if he had an object of sufficient interest to make him want to reform. All great reforms have come through women, she argued, why not this one?

The Count was not averse to speak about "his frien'," but as often as possible Leslie led him away from the topic, it savored to her of eavesdropping; besides, she could not tell just how much dependence to place upon the man's remarks.

"You were cruel to me at Deschenes," he said softly, speaking in French. "What have I done to make you change toward me?"

"I have not changed," Leslie answered, smiling ever so little. "They say that when one finds another changed, the change is due to oneself."

They were sitting at a small table in a corner somewhat out of the line of observation from the careless throng of Roof Gardeners.

Leonard de Vinville hesitated a fraction of a second, then spoke quietly, forcefully for him, with a total absence of the birdlike, staccato jerks which usually characterized his speech and actions.

"You are right, Mlle. Leslie, I have changed in the great, wonderful way, which only comes to a man once. I see everything differently, more beautifully; I, myself, am radiating a power, a force, a strength, I never knew was in me." He laid his small white hand upon his breast, and leaned across the table. "It is you who have made the change, it is all for you; I can make myself what I please—

what you please. Leslie, I love you. I make you an offer of marriage!"

The music ceased, and Leslie, sitting opposite the stage, saw a repulsive figure lurch to the centre of it. The man's nose was a brilliant crimson, his mouth hung idiotically open, his eyes, half closed and crossed, leered odiously. He began speaking thickly. She reminded herself of Elsie Venner, only instead of snakes she attracted drunkards. Leslie shuddered.

"Let us go," she said, rising.

"You have not answered me," murmured her companion, as they reached the street.

"Will you walk a little?" asked the girl. "I should like it. I am sorry, bitterly sorry," she continued presently, "to hurt you, but I can't marry you, Count de Vinville. If I have given you any reason, any encouragement, to cause you to speak as you have, please forgive me. I seem to have an unfortunate manner," she spoke almost bitterly, "in that I am not able to be merely nice to a person without misleading him." She was thinking particularly of Don, whose silently sorrowful eyes had haunted her uncomfortably during the days at Deschenes. He had seemed to be sorry for her.

The Count behaved like a man, and at this moment Leslie liked him immensely. He seemed to drop dramatics, and was nothing more than a grievously disappointed lover.

"I suppose I know women well enough to understand that your 'no' means just that, only I can't

give you up so easily, *mon adorée.* Of course it may mean nothing to you, but I want to tell you that I am not like so many of my countrymen for whom I blush, an impecunious fortune seeker. Mrs. Stearns' words, though spoken in jest last night at her charming home, stung. I have estates which are well kept up. Had you not a centime I would ask you just the same. Leslie, will you marry me? Ah, don't speak, I know that makes no difference—only I had to tell you."

"I am sorry," said Leslie again, "so sorry."

"It might come," suggested the Count, a little brokenly.

The girl shook her head. "I suppose you will go away, like they all do, and I will have lost another friend."

"Ah, but no," De Vinville exclaimed vehemently, "you do not *know* how I love you. I shall stay, and I shall be your friend always, always—if you will let me."

"Thank you," answered Leslie simply. "Thank you, and good night."

* * * * * * *

"A gentleman called you up, my dear," whispered Miss Polly, trying to persuade herself that perhaps Miss Libby and Clara were asleep; whereas she knew that they, too, like herself, were tossing restlessly about, waiting for Walter's return.

"Who was it—Don?"

"I think not, for Don would have told me, and

this person would give neither his name, message, or number. Walter is out," she added, with pitiful bravery. "I think *that* Mr. Tressidar must have called him. The 'phone rang soon after your friend had finished."

Leslie took her hat off and ran her hand through her hair before asking:

"Did you say where I had gone, and with whom?"

And Miss Polly, fearing she had bored her guest by such constant references to Walter, answered the question almost loquaciously. She had told the gentleman all she knew of Leslie's whereabouts, that she had gone, not to the Crowley's or Mrs. Stearns', as he supposed, but to the Roof Garden—yes, she remembered saying she had gone with Count de Vinville, was she right?"

Leslie kissed the lovable Miss Polly good night, and went to her room. She was glad to think that Algy had tried to see her, and that joy almost counterbalanced the fearful realization of what Algy's alternative meant. He would have his way, or he would drink. What a sword to hold over her, her! Leslie, the care-free, the sole mistress of herself, to barter herself for a little love and much misery—how much she could not tell!

Margaret Crowley sat with her in an attitude of obvious uneasiness, perhaps ten days after that night.

"Won't you change your mind, and come?" she urged for the fiftieth time.

"No, dear, thank you, I don't believe I can go

with you to-morrow. Perhaps later in the summer I may run down, if you will have me."

Margaret looked hopelessly at the slight form standing now beside an open window. The air was heavy and sultry, making her long for space, freedom, and purity of atmosphere. Leslie was puzzling her somewhat, and she wanted to put her suspicions to rest.

"Where are you going, after leaving Miss Polly?"

"Oh, I don't know," was the evasive answer. "Edgeville, maybe, the Adirondacks——" she shrugged her shoulders. "You know how ridiculously indefinite I am, Margaret, don't tease, there's a dear."

"You are the least indefinite person I know," complained the other; "there lies the whole trouble, I don't want to force your confidence, Leslie, but won't you tell me what has come over you lately?"

"Dear me," sighed Leslie, "who would have thought that my manner would affect every one so seriously!"

"Then others *have* noticed it?" asked Margaret eagerly, for her.

Leslie bit her tongue, then decided that Margaret might as well know now as any other time—might as well know something of what had "changed her," so she said:

"Count de Vinville asked me to marry him—and I—refused."

There was silence for a moment. Margaret

Crowley would have given half of her worldly possessions to have been able to throw aside her habitual restraint, to show what she felt.

"I am glad, for you," she heard herself saying stiffly, "the Count is very nice, I am sure; and it is quite an honor, but, Leslie, I am clumsy and probably will do as Don says, jump hard upon the most sensitive spot, and hurt."

"Yes, Margaret."

"But oh, dearie, was it because you cared for some one else?"

For an instant Leslie wavered, then she whispered:

"Yes."

"Oh"—the voice was full of panic. "It isn't Mr. Tressidar, Leslie?"

"It *is* Mr. Tressidar, Margaret."

The moment was dramatic, and yet Leslie Loring for once missed its theatrical possibilities. It seldom happens that two women bare their hearts completely to each other, and it probably would not have occurred now had these two been other than the staunch and tried friends they were.

They looked earnestly into one another's eyes, and, finding only great love written there, Leslie took out her heart and laid it in the palm of Margaret's hand, that she might watch it beat.

"I am sorry, so sorry, that I am going to try to tell you why. I, even I, can see the humor of telling a woman that the man she loves is not worthy of her."

Leslie smiled. "Is that all?"

"Not half! Listen: All these things I am going to tell you *I know!* To begin with, Mr. Tressidar was sent out here because his parents were ashamed to have him at home. His debts nearly ruined his father, and his disgraceful conduct nearly broke his mother's pride. Since coming here he has but continued his accustomed mode of living, he has drunk with sickening persistence, he"—Margaret stopped, it was hard to speak of these things at any time, especially to Leslie, just now, "he has indulged himself unstintingly in other ways, and, Leslie, *he can't stop!*"

The clock ticked irritatingly; a fly, having discovered some secret passage into the house, flaunted his superior knowledge by buzzing, insistently, around Leslie's head. She noted these things with heightened sensibilities, a keenness of perception which almost hurt. Yet to show Margaret that her words did not matter, she leaned close against the screen, pretending to gaze intently at something in the street below. *"He can't stop!"*

"You have no right to say that until he has tried," she finally contradicted. "A person can do anything they wish, if they wish it enough."

"Yes," cried the older woman triumphantly, "there is the point, he will never wish *enough* to stop. He wants a thing until he gets it, then wants something else. Oh, Leslie, think what you are doing! Why don't you reconsider poor Percy Haslett and marry him?" she asked desperately.

"Pouf!" Leslie made a *moue* of disgust; "that idiot! In just about ten years he will be bald, have creases in his neck which will make it hang over his collar, and he will have a round, fat stomach. Not much!"

"Well, even the Count——"

"No, nor the Count, when he gets tired of me he will make friends with the children of all the pretty women as a stepping stone—you know the kind."

"Oh, Leslie, I wouldn't say that about him, even though I heartily disapprove of international marriages. Clifford Scott——"

"A babe in his cradle! No, thanks, Margaret; when I want to adopt a child, it will not be Clifford." She was excited and spoke a little more sharply than was intended, as she inquired, sarcastically:

"Are you sure you have not forgotten anyone?"

A glance at Margaret's face brought quick realization of what she had said, and tears of mortification sprang in her eyes.

"There *is* one more whose name I had purposely refrained from mentioning—it is Don. Why not Don, Leslie?"

She looked straight into the soul of Leslie Loring, and subterfuge was useless.

"I don't know why, God hears me, that is the truth—I don't know 'why,' *I only know.*"

There was another long silence.

"I have loved you ever since you came into the room at Madame's, Leslie. I loved my home be-

cause it was a place for you to come. I was glad I had a brother to be nice to you. That was years ago, and I used to ache sometimes to think how, being only a day scholar, I could not be with you more. Later, when we grew to womanhood and you still were sweet to me, accepting my love in its dumbness, I was glad I had Don to lavish on you all the fondness I felt and could not show. Very recently I saw my cherished dreams coming true, and now—now—you would give him up for——"

"Don't say it, Margaret, don't!"

If anyone ever had called Margaret Crowley by a nickname, Leslie would have done it now. She would have done anything to get close to this ideal creature whom she felt would not understand by reason of her very ideality. A little more quietly Leslie spoke.

"There was once a time—a half minute, perhaps—when I thought of marrying Don. You don't know how very hard it is for me to speak to you like this——" she broke off, with an appealing outstretching of her hands. "When I tried to picture myself happy with him, Margaret, it was farcical. I tried to think of watching for him to come home to dinner, to show him a new gown, to plan a summer's outing—it was hopeless. The tragic truth is, dear, *dear* Margaret, that *I take Don for granted.* Ah, if you could know the difference between that affection and this other thing which is a part of me, for which I live." She laughed a little. "I am trying not to be melodramatic."

"Go on, please," urged Margaret, slowly, softly.

"My first waking thought is for Algy, a continuation of those I have had in my sleep. I dress thinking of what will please him, what he will say to me, what I will say to him. I plan the long morning so that I may not neglect anything, and yet leave room for some thought of him. I eat my lunch buoyantly, joyfully, excitedly while my heart is singing loud paens of gladness—he will soon be here. I compare him with the other men; I love his fastidiousness, his very gestures make me dizzy with joy; the dear way he bends his head when listening to me, or asking me a question, thrills me foolishly. When he comes into a room everything seems changed, brighter, happier. When he goes out a certain part of it seems lacking, and I feel lonely, but—I like it. The night of the fire he kissed me," she forgot Margaret's presence, and murmured the words as though to herself, while the older woman gazed, fascinated—"he kissed me, he said he loved me. With that remembrance nothing could hold me. Were I married to another man and the mother of his children; were he or they dying and Algy called 'Come to me—I love you,' I would *go*. Do you hear me, Margaret," she ran to her friend and shook her gently, "do you hear me? *I would go!*"

There was silence.

"That is love," said Leslie, deep in her throat. Her eyes were almost black, "at least, that is a very small part of it. You may think that I am

a creature of impulse that I have not weighed the consequences. If you do you are mistaken. I realize that I must never relax, that I must guard him without letting him know it, that my patience and my forgiveness must be limitless, that I must not fill my life with other things, that I must not try to forget, but to remember, I can't expect to hold him without constant effort. I must not be fretted by his casualness, that I must demand little and give much. What of it? It will be the making of me, it will be my discipline—my happiness."

Again there was a pause, and Margaret thought of her life, barren in a measure. She thought of her great strength and capacity for loving, and wondered why it had not been given her to guide Tressidar's wayward footsteps.

"Has he asked you to marry him?" inquired practical Miss Crowley, in a tone which was meant to be kind. She was totally unprepared for the change which came over Leslie, for the girl, after catching her breath sharply, shook her head, and crumpled up in an inert heap on the floor.

The following afternoon Vera, and Burnley, Clifford Scott, Leslie and Tressidar were having tea together. The Crowleys had left in the morning, and Leslie was getting ready to go down to Edgeville, she said.

"Ah, sorceress," cried Vera, shaking a knowing finger at Leslie, "have you been further importuned by Mr. Higgins, or, perhaps, by Mr. Carson?" She

turned to Tressidar and sighed: "Oh, the responsibility of being a siren!"

"Who are these gentlemen?" asked Algy, looking away from Vera.

"Ss-h!" she laid a secretive finger on her lips. "One is the sage of Edgeville, a man who laid claim to Leslie's affections, even at a tender age, and the other—has the engagement been renewed so far this summer?" she asked, in another tone, as though the Fates themselves hung in the balance.

"No, he has not taken time by the fetlock, as Lew Higgins used to say," replied the girl, laughing.

"What, do my ears deceive me?" Burnley was utterly incredulous; "is it possible that you are not engaged?"

"She is *always* engaged to some one," interrupted Vera scornfully; "to whom is it now, Leslie?"

A sudden tenseness seemed to grip them all. From badinage there was an indescribable sliding into seriousness.

"To whom are you engaged now, Leslie?" repeated the widow, trying to laugh.

"Algy Tressidar," answered Kitty Loring's daughter, with a sob in her throat.

"Count de Vinville," announced Morton, as though waiting for a pause in the conversation.

PART II.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

It is but natural that a woman's marriage marks the greatest change in her life. Aside from that, it is perhaps difficult to lay one's finger upon the year or number of years stamping one's life particularly.

The five years following her marriage were full of changes—events intimately connected with Leslie Tressidar, and ones which came with alarming suddenness. First came the news of Mr. Edge's death; Clifford Scott, whom she had always considered irreproachable, from a moral standpoint, ran away with a notorious woman, leaving Leslie a letter full of bitterness, anger, and reproach. "I could have borne it had you chosen Don or even De Vinville," it said, among other things, "but by wantonly ruining your own life this way you are responsible for mine, as well. This will be a comforting thought for you some night when you lie awake and curse the hour you were born."

About two years after her own marriage Angelique and Tom Edge followed her example, and the following year when journeying from the south

where Tom had settled, to Edgeville, with their infant daughter, they were killed. The baby's life was saved, and she went into the Edge household a lonely little creature, more set apart from her surroundings than Leslie was, at the time of her advent there. Margaret Crowley was very much the same serious, earnest worker, and Don—had she been asked, Leslie would have said that she saw him frequently. As a matter of fact, it was rather seldom, so seldom that he was unchanged to her, though Margaret saw him with very different eyes. Mrs. Crowley had passed away, and the brother and sister drew much nearer one another.

Last, there was the baby, not that he made as great a change in the Tressidars' life as in the ordinary home; still, a baby *is* a factor, and any spare time or thought not given to Algy, Leslie devoted to little Loring. He was a peculiar child, preëducated, one might say. All of a mother's passionate love was given him before his birth, three years after Leslie's marriage.

He had been a gigantic problem to her, this baby, the greatest which had ever confronted her.

No one who knew Algy Tressidar would accuse him of an atom of domesticity, and those who did not know Leslie well said in that respect, if in no other, the Tressidars were well matched. As a matter of fact, she was both domestic and maternal, and she had yearned for a little child as only one born to be a mother could. It was on Algy's account that she hesitated to satisfy her longing, and

it was also partly on the child's account—it's future. For the first eighteen months everything went with absolute smoothness and accord. Leslie was afraid of her happiness. Algy seemed to share it fully. Their home was open to their many friends, and, contrary to the usual strain under which housekeepers live, Leslie had servants who adored her, and took pleasure in adding to her happiness, so that she was never fretted with domestic cares.

She and her husband lived by impulse, at least they seemed to, but secretly she was always watching, probing him to find out his desires, and to gratify them. Nothing was too much trouble for her to please him.

Dressed and waiting for dinner, Leslie would change entirely in answer to a 'phone message to meet her husband downtown, if he seemed to prefer that way of spending the evening to coming home. She never went away without him. If he went first, she would often go out and allow herself to be amused rather than mope alone, but her days were always free. Algy took his choice of hours, as it were, and her friends took the remainder. How seriously, then, did she consider the problem of her duty and responsibility toward a child!

Algy always said he was fond of children, but Leslie realized that he was like a good many persons whose fondness rarely stands the strain of a child's society for more than an occasional half

hour when it is good, and who wonder, with ill-concealed annoyance, why a troublesome child ever was born. She realized that he would be totally unsympathetic and uninterested in any vital issue concerning the child, and she wondered whether she was equal to the task alone.

The hard thing about dealing with Algy was that he was always good natured, he always acquiesced, but if he did not like the decision Leslie made he would leave her and amuse himself in his own way. Because of his indifference to the world at large he could not understand the tremendous amount of importance his wife attached to his presence with her—he could never feel that she absolutely relied on his being near for her happiness. Consequently he was reprehensively lax in keeping his appointments with her, especially where social engagements were concerned.

"Margaret is going to have a dinner on Thursday," she had told him one day at lunch; "it is going to be great fun—a crowd of prominent socialists will be there, and, of course, Mr. Carter. Actually, Algy, she is almost excited!"

"Really?" asked Tressidar, smiling at his wife's enthusiasm.

"You were thinking of something else," accused Leslie, pouting.

"Not-a-tall," declared the man, going around to her chair and bending over her. "I heard every word."

"I am going to have a new gown by then, Osmonde says."

"What, waste a new gown on Socialists!"

"Oh, *some* others will be there. Won't it be fun?"

"Jolly," agreed Algy, kissing her full red lips.

But when the evening came Algy telephoned from town saying he could not get home, he was sorry; couldn't Miss Crowley fill his place?

Another time he and Leslie were looking over *Country Life,* and she was going into raptures over some of the illustrations.

"Oh, Algy, I have always wanted to build a bungalow," she cried. "Look at that one; isn't it a love?"

"A perfect love," her husband breathed, with exaggerated enthusiasm. Leslie half closed her eyes and pulled his hand tight about her, snuggling close against him.

"Just think, a dear little bungalow way, way off in the country, maybe in the woods, where we would need a guide every time we stepped beyond the doorsill, and no one else but Algy and Leslie, and perhaps a dog. Yes, of course, a dog. Think of the canoe we would have and the long days with books, and maps, and a pipe, and lunch way, way off where there was no one but Algy and Leslie——"

"And the guide," he interrupted.

"No, not even the guide, nor dog. We could go out at sunset and paddle into the golden twi-

light, until the stars 'tumbled out neck and crop, and we'd think that we surely were dreaming, with the peace of the world piled on top.' Just Algy and Leslie! Oh, darling, wouldn't you love to build a little house like that"—she had straightened up and was looking at him now, looking for an answer, a response to her enthusiasm. Finding it was not there, she burst into a merry laugh—"and then not live in it."

Algy caught her to him, and, tilting her head back, kissed her lingeringly.

"That is just what I should like to do, Little Lady," he said, "build a little bungalow off in the woods and—not live in it." The subject was forever dropped.

One day Clara Bryce brought her second baby for Leslie to see, and Algy happened to be at home. He looked at his wife curiously as she took the tiny creature in her arms, and, oblivious to everything else, talked to it, as only a woman can.

"Isn't he a darling, Algy?" Leslie raised dewy, shadowy eyes to her husband.

"He certainly is a very nice baby," conceded Tressidar patiently.

"Take him," begged his wife, "take him, and see whether he cries."

The result was unsatisfactory, for the young scion of the Bryce family rent the peaceful air with shrieks and howls.

"He evidently doesn't care for male society,"

smiled the man. "I had better get beyond his range of vision."

Leslie knew that he was bored, and was intensely relieved when Clara announced her intention of going home before it grew too chilly. She wanted to catch Algy alone before he went out.

"What an odd person you are, Leslie," he said, as she came into the den. "For one so out of the ordinary, you are at times *the* most commonplace one I ever saw. I really expected to hear you discuss the merits or disadvantages of the different baby foods with that little simpleton."

Leslie looked at her husband with surprise, then a tender, loving little smile crept round the corners of her mouth. Algy was jealous!

Some weeks after that she and Tressidar were dressing for the theatre, that is, Leslie was trying on a gown which had just come home, and her husband watched Ceciley's deft fingers, finding with ease the numbers of hooks and eyes.

"Do you like it?" asked Leslie anxiously.

Tressidar shrugged his shoulders, and put his head on one side.

"It is not my idea of a success," he said finally. "I think Osmonde is not doing so well lately for you, Little Lady; these clothes always make you look so fat."

For an instant Leslie's head swam, and she felt a choking in her throat. This seemed to be the time to tell him.

"That's all, Ceciley, thank you. Algy—my dar-

ling husband," she continued, in a different tone, sinking on a large white rug beside him, "Algy, darling, I can't help looking queer—it is not Osmonde's fault. I am afraid—I'll—look—worse—than this—for a little while."

Tressidar drew away from her—recoiled, indeed, and looked into the upturned, anxious face.

"My God!" his voice was full of consternation. "My God, Little Lady, you are joking!"

The next three months were serious ones; both Leslie and her husband tried to forget that night, and from the very avoidance of the topic made it more momentous.

When the child was born Tressidar, pleading an inability to see Leslie suffer, went away for a week. Another woman would have resented this as a sign of neglect, but Leslie did not harbor any feeling of rancour, because she was glad that Algy should not see her "at her worst."

Margaret Crowley, who came to see the happy mother a day or so before Algy came home, asked:

"What did your husband say when he saw the baby?"

"Oh, he is away," answered Leslie, as though it was the most natural thing in the world.

"Away!" repeated Margaret, in astonishment. She opened her lips to speak further, looked at Leslie lying there with the child in her arms, then rose quickly and lightly kissed her cheek. "I must not tire you," she said, "good-by!"

"Isn't Leslie a wonder?" asked Vera Burnley of

her as they met in the hall below. "Oh, I knew Algy (Vera was the only one who called Tressidar by his Christian name) was away, George told me. I also think he has gone with Walter Bryce, though George did not quite say that. But just imagine letting him go!"

Margaret shrugged her shoulders. "She not only lets him—she urges him to do whatever he pleases."

"She has always been so patient with him," sighed Vera enviously; "he ought to crawl into her presence on all-fours."

"Well, he does love her," Margaret felt she must do even Tressidar justice.

"Why shouldn't he? She has never relaxed one iota since her marriage, like most of us do; she keeps him guessing, she flirts with him, she feeds the brute as Max O'Rell advises, she concentrates in a whole-souled and romantic way upon him alone. It is as though they were sweethearts—more, she holds him in the very way I should imagine a man's mistress would try to keep him." Then Vera laughed. "Why, do you know, Margaret, she was panic stricken because she did not know what to do with her glorious hair——"

"Hair?" Margaret repeated, puzzled.

"Yes, hair. She could not wear it uncurled, and would not 'put it up' when he might see her; she even dreaded meeting him for the first time each day. I wormed that out of Ceciley. An *intimate* existence, stripped of Life's niceties would have

disgusted Algy Tressidar and strangled every atom of affection."

Margaret thought proudly of her own conventional home, and pictured Algy sitting opposite her in the morning. Then she flushed guiltily.

Vera went on:

"Leslie always said she loathed the sort of woman who looks like a surprised feather bed in the morning, and is only well-groomed after lunch. Heaven knows she has lived up to her standard. She goes through more Delsarte and Swedish movements—she spends more time in beautifying herself, in a week than I do in a month, and she does it all for him. Me, I don't care; I think George is a hero, and he thinks I am an angel, and I love to be 'comfy.' I crawl into a faded old kimono and put my feet up on the couch, take a novel and a box of candy, and live. When I hear George open the door I fly into his arms and squeeze him."

Margaret laughed, and almost made a joke. "I don't believe you," she said.

Vera waved a deprecating hand.

"Let it pass. If you won't interrupt me, I will draw a vivid comparison showing you that Leslie 'fixes,' as our Southern friends say, for my brave Algernon." They spoke in lowered tones for a moment, then Vera finished: "If she is resting and she hears him coming, up she jumps, flies to the glass, powders her nose, pats her hair, and otherwise makes herself lovely." She sighed com-

miseratingly, and concluded: "Leslie does not know the joy of smothering a yawn, stretching herself, and murmuring: 'Oh, what's the odds, it's only Algy.'"

Tressidar's attitude toward his offspring savored of disfavor, although Leslie tried valiantly to keep the child in the background, and to prevent him from conflicting with Algy. Happily, Ceciley understood this, and now, as always, entered into her mistress' wishes with an energy and determination born of great love. She took entire charge of the boy, Loring, between whom and his father there early developed an antagonism, an animosity quite serious and lasting.

As the child grew older he and his mother spent the mornings together, as a rule. At that time Tressidar slept. Then, too, sometimes there was a delicious hour just at twilight when the little fellow would cuddle up to his mother and sit there watching the firelight flicker on her face—silent. He was a curious child, for days a perfect chatterbox, then suddenly veering to the opposite extreme, until Ceciley, quite disturbed, would send him, a dozen times a day, to his mother or father with a second-hand question on his lips.

These questions for the most part resulted in one of his own fashioning, invariably about his father, whom, by some queer evolution of his baby brain, he called *"Ugly."* Without stubbornness or a show of temper, Loring persisted in clinging to this name, even after understanding that the name

was Algy, not Olgy, nor Ugly. At first Tressidar was annoyed, then, perhaps because it was too much trouble to persevere, he gave up trying to correct the child, and found much humor in his nickname.

"Why doesn't Ugly get up when we do, Mammy?"

"He doesn't like catching the worm, perhaps," answered Leslie, laughing.

"Is that a joke? Where is a worm?"

"We may be the worms, son of mine," the mother said.

"What makes Ugly stay out so late, then?" asked the boy, still more earnestly.

Leslie started, and looked at him curiously. "How do *you* know he stays out late?" she asked.

"I *hear* him," announced the little chap, triumphantly, "and I get out of bed sometimes and watch him coming up the stairs. And once," he lowered his voice to a confidential whisper, "I saw him coming slowly up the stairs holding tight to the banister, and tripping just like I used to. And, Mammy, I hid behind my door, and when you opened your door you cried out loud, and said: 'Oh, Ugly, you did break your word again!' What is break your word, Mammy?"

Leslie listened, horror stricken. How much did this child know? His very silence all these months may have been proof of his knowledge! She thought how carefully, how painstakingly, she had always tried to make Loring love his father, hoping

that by the very fulness of love—confidence entrusted to him, Algy would strive harder to be worthy of it. Then she realized that the boy was waiting for an answer.

"To break your word, dear son, is to promise something and not keep that promise. Suppose you promised mother that you would never speak of your dear father in—in—this—this way to any one else but her, then, darling, you would have to keep your promise, or you would be breaking your word; do you understand?"

"Yes, Mammy, dear."

"Well, will you promise only to talk to mother about these things?"

"Not even Ceciley?"

Leslie hesitated an instant. Of course Ceciley knew, though by unremitting care she prevented Algy's lapses from being generally known; he was never boisterous and never ill. Staying in his or her room so much ordinarily, these "days after," caused no particular comment among the servants.

"Well, perhaps Ceciley," she conceded thoughtfully, "but no one else; do you promise?"

"Yes, I promise."

There was a long silence, Leslie busy with her own thoughts, forgot all about the serious-eyed child sitting beside her. She looked into the mystic shadows cast by slowly rising flames, and wondered whether that peace, that haven from tears and sighs such as she had known during the first year of her marriage, would ever come again. For

the last few days she had watched Algy with misgiving and concern. The suspicious restlessness became more and more apparent, until, unable to fight any longer, he had announced his intention of going for a long tramp that afternoon.

"Take me, dear," begged Leslie, putting her arms about his neck wistfully.

"Not to-day, Little Lady, I would rather go alone, if I may." He always remembered to be aloofly polite, and he kissed her good-by with just a shade less of deliberation than was his wont, and went out of the room.

"Mother," the child's voice implied that he had spoken before. He was standing in front of Leslie, his great, solemn eyes fastened upon her. "Mother, tell me, *is Ugly a drunker?*"

CHAPTER II.

Yes, Ugly was a "drunker." Leslie and Clara Bryce realized just what that meant, so perhaps did Miss Polly and her sister, whose health had failed greatly in the last few years. Without being absolutely insistent, Leslie could never discover with whom, besides Walter, her husband spent these riotous hours. She had but one consolation which was that she felt sure his other companions were men.

Of course, she did not prefer to have him drink, and never relinquished her hope of bringing him to a realization of his unmanly course, but she could even be happy with the knowledge of it as long as there were no other women. She understood the potency of her rival—Scotch—but she could not have made a constant struggle to hold Algy against other women—and fail. For once there was joy in the fight—at the thought of a cold and critical reception by the girls at Madame's, Leslie's sensitive soul had trembled; she felt she could not fight to win, but this was different, holding something of the same intense excitement for her that the angler feels, playing with a speckled trout. She had to let him go, sometimes he went

far, but then she forced him back again, and some day she hoped to "land him." "It is a game which I play," she often said to herself while waiting for the sound of his step, "one in which time counts for nothing. I must be able to stand off and look on at each success from greater heights. The failures then will seem small and dim in comparison. I must take success for granted, and be above failure."

True, the first time Algy had come to the house in a state of intoxication Leslie, through her very illness, really wanted to die, to take her life. Up to that time she could not believe the curse which had fallen on Clara Bryce would ever come to her. But instantly she put the thought vehemently from her as unworthy. She remembered a dissertation of her own, delivered to Vera Stearns, in one of her very few melancholy moods.

"Suicide?" Leslie had said. "No, the idea is preposterous, my dear!" Leaving fear of the performance, the blot on one's family, and religion, out of the question, suicide is useless—it gains nothing. As well as poetic, Life is tiresomely practical, mathematically so, I might say. All of Life is a Problem—ours differ very slightly, though we can't see that—and when we pass on to another existence we simply take up higher mathematics, as it were. If you leave your problem unfinished *here,* it only means that you will have to go over the same uninteresting work *there.*"

"How big you are, Leslie," Vera sighed enviously.

The second time Algy lapsed Leslie was more or less prepared for it, and she did not feel so tragically hurt. The hideous illness was just as bad, the aching just as great, but in some wonderful way she made it less a part of her. "It is a game," she kept saying to herself, "only a game, and I must play to win—impersonally. One gets a better perspective by being less personal."

So she waited for him at the top of the stairs, her eyes wide with horror, her soul writhing.

Tressidar did not see his wife until he reached the landing a few feet from her. Then he took off his hat politely and made a sort of staggering bow.

"Scuse me for coming home drunk, Lit'l' Lady! 'S perfectly in scuseable, realize fact. Sh no ush to shtay up, 'm not ver' bad—musht go t' bed."

"Algy, my husband," cried the girl brokenly, "let me help!"

For days he "drank," and for the most part Leslie kept away from him, nor did he send for her, and when the "attack" was over she redoubled her tenderness.

"I am not worthy of your slightest consideration, dearest," Tressidar told her a dozen times during the first weeks after, "and it appals me when I think how I have ruined your life."

"You have not ruined it—you need not ruin it," she corrected, fixing her great, luminous eyes on

him. "I trust you enough to know that you will make a fight such as never before, and you will win, won't you?" she plead, leaning toward him.

"Oh, God, how I love you!" he breathed, catching her to him. "Don't move, except to come closer to me."

Their lips met, and the man made a little sound of delight.

"Algy," Leslie whispered, forgetting all the world in the rapture of his caress.

An "attack" always terminated in a scene of this sort, and the subject was dropped until the next time.

Another time she thought she would experiment and see if an attitude of wounded pride would have greater effect. Once she tried tears and protestations. In each case the man was properly repentant, he apologized, he was passionately tender and loving with his wife—and sinned again.

Leslie's friends held different views regarding her and her life.

Don Crowley was a sadly changed man, though she did not see it, or, if she did, attributed it to a premature aging of one who came of naturally serious stock. He staggered under the weight of the burden of remorse, and a rather far-fetched self-accusation for having brought Tressidar and Leslie together.

He watched the two with morbid solicitude, and, knowing what manner of man had robbed him of Leslie, he could not bring himself to believe that

she was happy. He allowed his imagination to play him strange tricks whenever he was with her; the recollection of his own part in her life never left him, and he began to totter under the strain of constant brooding.

Happy or not, Leslie did not understand Don as she had in the years gone by, and he rather bored her by his melancholy.

She always felt that he expected something of her, and she resented it. Don did hope for something, though he did not actually expect it. He hoped that Leslie would give him an opening by which he could tell her of his care and thought for Algy, and perhaps—perhaps she would ask his help. Of course, she could not know that Don kept pretty close tab upon Tressidar, often bringing him home from horrible "holes" in the city, or delaying him at the club, drunk, sacrificing his own time and inclination by so doing, rather than know he had gone to one of these repulsive places.

Leslie sat sewing on a suit for Loring. He was going to Edgeville to spend the summer, and was anxious to go, for, in his serious way, he confided to his mother that he had been too long away from Edna Edge, Tom's child.

"When I get through marrying you and Ceciley, Mammy, I promised Edna to marry her."

Somehow, things had lost their savor of late, she felt nervous and depressed, which was only natural, owing to the fact that Algy had another "attack," and had not been home for a week.

It was the uncertainty, the nerve-racking uncertainty which hurt so. Constantly on the *qui vive,* constantly expecting him, the tension was horrible. Even Loring's birthday, his sixth birthday, failed to create a happy diversion, for Leslie gave so much of her time and thought to little things in connection with Algy.

"Perhaps he will come this afternoon," she had said. "I will order everything he likes for dinner, and we will go to the theatre after."

She ate the dinner alone and cancelled the order for tickets.

"He will surely come to-night," she had thought, "and so I will fix everything 'comfy' and cozy in his room."

She dressed herself in a favorite kimona (Vera Burnley said Leslie never *undressed*), put a rose in her hair, and waited until the gray dawn stretched a warning finger across the sky.

"I must sleep," she sighed, "or I'll be a fright when he comes to-day," and so on.

Some one came up the steps; the needle, stripped of its guidance, slid sharply into Leslie's tender skin, and drew a large, trembling drop of blood from it. She did not notice, her heart beat uncomfortably, and her lips parted in what she thought was a smile.

The steps paused outside her door, which was ajar, and some one knocked.

"Come in," she cried, rising eagerly.

"Mr. Crowley to see you, madame."

To the woman's overwrought nerves Thomas' tone sounded sympathetic. "Are you at home?" he asked deferentially.

"I will be down in a few moments," answered his mistress, controlling herself with an effort. "Close the door."

As the latch caught, Leslie Tressidar pressed her hands against her head and moaned. Then, raising herself, she drew a long breath.

"Perhaps he has sent me a message," she said. "Ceciley!"

"Did you call me, Miss Leslie?"

"Ceciley, Mr. Crowley is downstairs. I think I shall go down. Do—er—do I—er—look sleepy?"

This faithful servant shared something of Don Crowley's feeling, in that she longed for a breaking of the barrier Leslie raised between them.

If she had only said "I am a little bothered today, will you see that no one disturbs me?" or if she would show just once a lapse into her old impulsiveness, and say, "I am worried about Mr. Tressidar," Ceciley would have had fewer heartaches. This constant secretiveness, even to her, caused her many hours of agony, but to Leslie in her selfish absorption Ceciley's suffering was not at all apparent.

"No, lamb, you don't look sleepy, though I dare say the air would freshen you up a bit. Will you go out, just to please me?"

Mrs. Tressidar looked at her maid sharply, then

into the mirror. The lines about her lips were not as faint as formerly, nor were the lips as red.

"Go out?" she repeated, putting out her foot, "well, perhaps I will. You might change my shoes, anyway."

Don, abnormally alert, instantly exaggerated the change he saw in Leslie, although he wisely did not mention it. He had really come to find out whether or not Tressidar had returned, for after the first three days carousal the man had eluded him, and this time he was evidently alone, for Walter Bryce had gone home two or three days ago, and knew nothing of his whereabouts.

"Will you come for a drive, Les?" asked Don. "I have the car here."

Leslie hesitated; Algy would surely come to-night, he might come and find her gone. Then what would he say? She had always been waiting.

"We won't go far," Crowley suggested, not too anxiously. "I myself have an engagement for dinner; this is only in case you were going to insist upon my staying here," he added, with a happy return of his old-time manner.

Leslie laughed. "I wish you would stay here," she said, though somewhat mechanically. She was wondering how to ask Don whether he had seen Algy, without letting him know the whole circumstances connected with his long disappearance.

"I've not seen Margaret lately," she continued, in the machine, "is she away?"

"No, she says she can't leave town until late in the summer, this year, if she goes at all. I am fairly content; the house is far cooler than a hotel would be, and we have sold the cottage."

"Really?"

"Oh, yes." Don's voice unconsciously drifted back to his tone of melancholy. "Things are not the same as in the old days when we used to have the crowd down there."

"I suppose that means me." Leslie felt better for companionship and the fresh air. Her buoyancy was heaven-sent and greatly needed; it was the capacity for throwing off trouble which kept her sane.

"Yes," the man's voice was much more serious than she liked. "I rather fancy that means you. Do you remember the day Clifford came into the dining room and asked where the crowd was?"

"No, I don't, Don."

"Well, of course you couldn't remember anything except hearing about it, for you were not there—all the rest were, and Clifford coming into the room naively asked, "Why, where is the 'crowd'?"

"How funny!" Leslie's eyes scanned the passers-by keenly. They were driving in the vicinity of the club, and she hoped desperately to catch sight of her husband.

"Have you been to the club to-day?" asked Algy's wife at last, her eyes on the sidewalk.

"Yes, I dropped in before coming to your

house," Don answered, in what he hoped was an evasive tone. He wanted Leslie to question him further.

"You did not see Algy there, did you?" The woman turned slowly from her scrutiny to Crowley, and her eyes made him ache.

"Not to-day," he answered almost carelessly.

"Oh, was he there yesterday?" Perhaps Leslie would have been more on her guard were she not in such a pitiably nervous state, for she had not intended to let Don know that her husband had an "attack."

"No, dear, nor yesterday. I came to see you this afternoon to offer my help, if you will only take it, Leslie. *Don't* put me aside! Oh, please, don't put me entirely out of your life! If by helping him"—he hesitated at the pronoun—"I can help you, I ask nothing more than to do it that way!"

There was a moment's silence.

"I don't know where he is, if that is what you mean." Leslie spoke each word slowly and with a peculiar emphasis, as though she wanted Don to realize that she was not evading the subject. "Do you?"

"No."

There was silence again, and they turned toward home.

"When did you last see him?"

"At the club, three days ago."

"Is Walter at home?"

"Yes. I have visited all their accustomed——"

"Haunts," suggested Leslie.

"But don't fret and worry, Leslie. I intend to find him to-night, or to-morrow without fail. I only wanted to feel that my search was a necessary one—I mean that he was not at home."

"Of course I can 'phone you if he comes in the meantime."

"Will you not come somewhere and have dinner with me now?"

"But you said you were engaged for dinner; besides——"

Don waved a deprecating hand.

"Well, I never like to be away, in case he might come."

"Just this once," Crowley begged. "You look as though you needed a change."

The look of tender solicitude touched Leslie, it was such a novelty to be thought of and taken care of. She would like to dress, have dinner, and go to the theatre. Why not?

"When shall I come back?" asked Don, as though she had consented.

"In about an hour," returned the woman, half afraid.

The evening passed quickly for them both.

"Now, supper, just for the sake of old times," Don said, leading her out of the crowded lobby carefully; he was nearer happiness than he had been for months. Proximity to Leslie always thrilled him, and her leaning toward him and al-

lowing him even a glimpse into her trouble seemed to draw them wonderfully close once more.

"No, Don, don't pity me," she said, when they were seated at a small table. "I don't feel as badly broken up as you might think. Oh, I *love* Sherry's, don't you?"

"Will you send for me and always let me help?" asked Crowley, fearful lest he should lose his advantage. "Will you promise?"

"There is nothing you can do that you have not already done," the tone was serious, and the huge, gray eyes were grave. "You can't keep him from —It—and the only thing that sometimes worries me is the thought that there may, some day, be another woman."

Don's face reflected the crimson flush which rose to Leslie's burnished hair. Yes, he, too, shared her feeling—drink was bad enough, but wine *and* women, with Leslie waiting there, "God," his teeth snapped together spasmodically, "I would kill him!" he muttered to himself.

"I should feel as though I were fighting in the dark," he heard Leslie saying, as though to herself, "only I think I should like to know."

"Really?" the man's voice was almost incredulous.

"Why, certainly, anything would be easier to bear than suspicion—*suspicion!* Can't you understand that?"

"No." He was looking over her shoulder, toward the door which neither of them exactly faced.

He frowned ever so slightly, even though seeming to listen to Leslie's words eagerly, and to be anxious to have her explain further.

"No," he repeated, "I don't understand. Just what do you mean?"

His eagerness puzzled her, and a sudden intuition came to her—there was something electric in the atmosphere, and quite inexplicably Don's face opposite faded slowly away, a sickening nausea seized her, and she half rose from her chair. Two men and two women were standing at a near table while the waiter took their wraps.

The women were unmistakably actresses, one of the men was Count de Vinville, and the other was —Algy Tressidar.

CHAPTER III.

Miss Libby Bryce passed quietly away on an afternoon when the doctor had come to see Clara, who became so pitiful a prey to nervousness that the devoted little aunts often feared for her sanity. The doctor had graver reasons than they for fear, but he had never told them, only cautioned them to keep a watchful eye on her when in one of her fits of depression.

Miss Libby's death was a great surprise, and shock to them all, and a real grievance to Walter, who begrudged her the money expended on her funeral, modest as it was. He was badly in need of funds just at this time, having a new and absorbing *penchant* for the little French actress who was setting blasé old Gotham agog. He and Tressidar had seen her the first night of their last escapade, and both of them promptly succumbed to her heartless fascinations.

Tressidar was less lavish of gifts than his companion, though he could better afford them, having precisely the same amount of money at his disposal now as before his marriage. In so delicate a way that he could not feel a dependent, Leslie insisted upon assuming the total burden of house-

keeping, and there had been many times since when her husband gave her a silent vote of gratitude.

Creditors, tired of long-standing accounts, pressed Walter unmercifully, and he had intended asking his aunts for funds the very afternoon of Miss Libby's death, having invited Celeste the Adorable, and her friend Mlle. Jovin (whom he fondly imagined would interest Tressidar) to supper that night.

It therefore happened that on Bryce's 'phoning Algy downtown, of his aunt's death, late in the afternoon of the day Leslie saw him, Count de Vinville, conveniently and obligingly consented to make a fourth, and the party came off with éclat.

Neither of them saw or recognized Leslie, Don's presence of mind prevented that, for he put himself between them and the fainting woman, whom he literally carried out of the room.

De Vinville thought he recognized Crowley, but it did not occur to him at the instant that so successful a culmination of his schemes had already taken place.

For the Count was playing a nasty and dangerous game—not, by the way, one that he considered in that light, though; his moral sensibilities having been benumbed for a sad length of time. He, like Crowley (but for somewhat different reasons or from a different viewpoint), could not believe Leslie a happy woman; he, unlike Don, did not imagine that she knew Algy as she did, and to De Vinville the only thing needed to kill what

love she had for her husband was to bring her to a realization of the life he led.

With this lofty end in view and the glimmering of a rosy future for himself locked in the white arms which had hitherto entwined themselves about an unresponsive drunkard, he began cautiously to put temptation distractingly close to Algy Tressidar, and to help him overcome what fleeting scruples he may have felt. As in the case of Walter Bryce, the Englishman disliked De Vinville, and swore that he would have nothing to do with him. At times of sobriety he was flagrantly rude to the Count, but insidiously the other drew him into the toils, and it was through him that Algy shook off the tiresome attention of Walter Bryce, and gave himself into the hands which were to betray him. It was De Vinville who encouraged him to meet Celeste Mignon, as she prettily named herself; it was he who fanned the already glowing spark of flirtation in the dancer's heart, to a real and hungry flame, and it was he who sat complacently back to watch the little drama of his own fashioning.

He found, with satisfaction, that the longer he stayed away from Leslie the less Tressidar allowed any qualms of conscience to act as a counter-irritant, and the easier it was to lure him with the magic of Celeste Mignon's name.

At the club, a week or so after the supper at Sherry's, De Vinville was rather surprised to note that Crowley deliberately sought him as with a purpose. He allowed himself to drift apart from

the other men, and sat quietly listening to Don's commonplaces.

"Not going across this year?" he asked, lighting a cigarette.

"No," the Count answered, smiling. "I have interests here which will require my attention."

"Ah!" Crowley smiled, too. "We all get them sooner or later."

Except that both men had the same object—De Vinville to tell his secret and Crowley to hear it—this conversation could never have taken place. Each played his own part well, and while the result to Crowley was not what he wished, it was to the other eminently satisfactory.

"Yes, we all have interests which are absorbing, sooner or later," repeated the Count, "only this time, my frien', he is a man."

"I see, I see; very sad, isn't it?" Don hoped he appeared to be making conversation.

"Ah, but yes, it is sad," the other sighed, "for this time he seems positively infatuated."

They spoke for another half hour on the same topic, then left the club, going in different directions, Don making his way to Leslie's home, and De Vinville going jauntily downtown. He felt that *this* latest escapade would surely reach the ears of Mrs. Algernon Tressidar; before, he could not believe such knowledge had come to her.

Don waited, moodily, for Leslie to come downstairs.

"You were right," he said, when she came slowly

into the room, "she *is* Angelique's sister, and apparently as heartless and unprincipled as Angelique was the reverse. He seems to be with her every moment she is not 'on,' although he is sober most of the time. Leslie, dear, are you *sure* it helps you to have me tell you all this?"

"Quite sure, quite sure, Don! Thank you, my friend, from the bottom of my heart! I know what this espionage and detective work must have cost a man like you. I wish"—she hesitated—"I wish I could sufficiently thank you!"

Crowley did not trust himself to speak. For an instant he shared the Count's hope, that she wanted to be sure of Tressidar's unprincipled course before taking any decided steps herself, and his blood leaped wildly as he thought of a possible advantage to himself. But, raising his eyes suddenly, he saw her gazing at a photograph of her husband, and in them was such a look of suffering, of anguish, that he rose quietly and tiptoed reverently from the room.

For some moments Leslie sat there, and came to herself suddenly, realizing that Don had gone. Then, with heightened color, she ran quickly up the steps, calling Ceciley.

"I am going out," she cried, laughing nervously, "and I shan't be home to dinner."

The maid dressed her carefully, joyfully.

"She has got good news of him at last," she thought.

CHAPTER IV.

The bellboy took Mrs. Tressidar's card, a blank one upon which was written a couple of lines, in Leslie's firm hand, and departed. It seemed hours to the woman waiting before the elevator door clicked and she heard the unmistakable and inimitable rustle of silk skirts in the corridor. A sparkling vision ran into the room and into her arms.

"Ah, but you are an angel," it gushed volubly in French. "Of course I knew you lived here, but, alas for my poor head! I had forgotten the name of your husband. What is it? No matter, tell me of yourself. Eh?"

"How long can you spare me, alone and uninterrupted?" was Leslie's serious, surprising question. "I have much to say to you."

Celeste Mignon held her guest at arms' length, then laughed delightfully. "Oh, my sweet, I have *all* my time for you. Upstairs—pouf!" she snapped her fingers—"there is a pig of a lover —or one who would like to be. What of it—I will get rid of him at once, and we will go to my rooms and talk until I have to go to satisfy the hungry mob with my poor performance."

Felice, the estimable maid of Mlle. Celeste Mig-

non, with eye and ear alternately at the keyhole of the room adjoining, had never in all the years of her efficient service seen her young mistress so deeply affected, and she greatly feared for her appearance that night. "Tears are bad for the artiste," sagely commented Felice.

"Ah, but yes, my darling, it *shall* be done. To think that lying pig of a De Vinville never told me, and, ah, poor me—how could I know? Say again you forgive me, or I shall poison myself."

"Don't talk so," Leslie replied, unsteadily, too. "There is nothing to forgive, unless it is to forgive *him!* Only help me, that is all I ask."

While she was speaking she took her own card, which Celeste was still holding, and glanced at it, before destroying it.

"Please come to the drawing-room at once," it said. "I am an old friend of Angelique's, and must see you. Do not mention this to the person with whom you talk, as you love your sister." Leslie had relied cleverly upon the dramatic instinct rampant in Celeste, to impel her to carry out these directions to the letter, and she read the girl correctly.

"He had no suspicion," she vowed again, "that I swear!"

"When did you tell him to come back?"

"I said after the performance to come," she paused, "to come, as usual, to my dressing room." Leslie's white face smote her afresh. "Oh, blessed one," she moaned, sinking to her knees, "to think

it is your husband I have taken away! And my Angie loved you so!"

"If it had not been you, it would probably have been some one else," Leslie smiled bravely, "and then this chance would have been denied me."

"Yes, surely you can take him back with ease," the actress said confidently, "because—bah! he only loves me because I tease him. To-night he wanted me to go with him to——"

"Hurry!" interrupted Leslie. "Try some of your things on me—suppose they should not fit!"

"Of course, the theatre trunks are not here, but if this does"—slipping a house gown over Leslie's head—"the others will be all right."

They both inspected the gown carefully. It looked as though it had been made for Leslie. "Good!" cried Celeste. "Now for dinner, and the theatre early. I will coach you, there, and you can watch me from the balcony to-night. To-morrow there will be a matinée as usual, and if you feel equal you can go on then, if not, wait till to-morrow night. I shall not see him again."

They ate their dinner in feverish haste, and started immediately for the theatre.

On the way there Celeste outlined her sketch to the woman beside her. It was a clever little play, in which many persons were impersonated, requiring a constant and rapid change of costume. In each of these creations the adored Celeste was greeted with louder applause than the last, and when she finally appeared in amazingly scant at-

tire and commenced a slow and sensuous dance, the audience went mad, standing up in their seats and screaming at the top of their lungs.

"They remind me of hungry wolves," she said to Leslie, "with their tongues sticking out, and their hands like claws, stretched out to me. Sometimes I hate them all."

* * * * * * *

"Wonderful, my darling!" the excitable little creature said between laughter and sobs. "Splendidly done! You know the lines already. You have only to try the business once or twice more, and then do what you please, for the dance. Felice will dress you, just as she does me—and after tonight me—I go to the country for a week."

"Oh, Celeste, you are good, good," Leslie kissed her gratefully. "Are you sure you won't get into any trouble?"

The other snapped her fingers. "What trouble can I get into? The management can't know the difference, and, anyway, it is only the crowd they want. Felice can be trusted, and you have your own game to play outside. Come, let us make up. I will get you some black wigs to try."

The star's dressing room was heavy with the scent of flowers. Roses, violets, orchids, and carnations vied with each other in claiming her attention, but she brushed carelessly by the vases, and sat Leslie down in front of a silver laden dressing table. With a keen scrutiny at her face, and that

of her guest, she began touching Leslie here and there with the rabbit's foot, puff, and black pencil. As a finishing touch she laid a glossy wig over her fair hair.

"Voila," she cried, "which is you and which is me?"

The resemblance was remarkable, with the aid of pencils and the wig. Leslie laughed excitedly, for an instant forgetting the serious reason for the masquerade.

"Celeste," she suddenly went white under her rouge. "I am afraid!"

"Tut, tut!" answered the other; "come out on the stage; we may meet some one and see whether or not you have anything to fear." True, they met several of the artists, each of whom gave an envious and respectful salutation to Leslie, while the person for whom they were intended crept into a shadow and was taken for the maid, if noticed at all.

Later, Leslie went out in the house and watched breathlessly the rôle she was going to play.

On the stage, Celeste dragged through her part, to the horror of the management and Felice, and to the consternation of Tressidar, who also watched her eagerly.

She reminded him of some one at times, particularly to-night when her smile had a tinge of sadness in it, and her eyes were grave though her red lips were parted as she caught his feverish glance, fleetingly.

In spite of coaxing and storming, Tressidar was not admitted to the dressing room that night, and from his post at the stage entrance he saw three women enter Mlle. Mignon's cab, and drive rapidly away. The telephone was answered bv Felice, who assured Monsieur that Mademoiselle was very ill, and asked him please not to disturb her.

In the hotel Mlle. Celeste and Madame were again holding serious parley, and finally Felice jumped with surprise at the astounding command she received.

"I am going away for a day or so, and you will stay here, Felice. Madame is to take my place entirely. See that you help her all you can—and keep your mouth shut tight. Understand?"

The two women clung to each other a moment in silence.

"Courage, petite!" whispered one of them, walking dramatically out into the night.

CHAPTER V.

During the following morning letters, flowers, messages of all kinds beat an incessant tattoo upon Mademoiselle's door. Most of these were from Tressidar, demanding a hearing some time before evening. Finally Leslie became bold, and, handing a slip of paper to the maid, she bade her write:

"You may come to the dressing room after the matinée. C. M."

"Does he know her writing?" she asked, in sudden alarm.

"*Mais non,* madame. Mademoiselle she would not take the trouble to write so much. She either pays no attention or sends a telegram."

Arrived at the theatre, veiled heavily, Leslie found every one solicitous regarding her health, which she assured them all to-day was quite restored. Her French, almost perfect, interspersed with broken English, was a marvelous imitation of the Mignon's, and throughout the whole afternoon everything went well. The performance itself was a perfect success, and Felice experienced an instant's jealous pang that her mistress should have so adaptable an understudy. Leslie's dance, if anything, surpassed the other, the music went to her

head like wine, the applause stimulated her to greater efforts, and Algy's dark, attentive face seemed everywhere in the house. Time after time her eyes were drawn back to his, though she had not meant to look, and she saw with consternation that toward the last he was so restless as to be almost unable to keep his seat.

Hardly had she changed when he rapped at the door.

Leslie's heart stood still as she signalled the maid to turn off a bunch of lights.

"Darling!" the man breathed, trembling with passion, "you were supurb this afternoon—better than ever. Oh, how proud I was of you, and how jealous, too," he added, whimsically rubbing his face against hers, "to think that all those other people even had the chance of loving you! I want you all to myself."

Leslie laughed and drew away slightly. Her eyebrows and lashes were very much blackened, shading her eyes so that they looked dark and gleaming. She closed them slightly, and looked keenly at him. There was a hungry look upon his face, which at the same time disgusted and thrilled her, and she found it desperately hard to realize that she was some one else for the moment.

"Seely boy," she whispered.

Oblivious to the maid, whom Leslie felt was watching them surreptitiously, Tressidar caught the girl in his arms and kissed her long, full on her red lips.

"Say you'll come to me," he whispered hotly. "Say it, darling!"

Leslie lay in his arms a moment, and closed her eyes; then she suddenly, petulantly, pushed him away.

"I hate you, you crush my hair!" she pouted.

They dined together, in Celeste's rooms; Tressidar took her to the theatre, and waited with feverish impatience for the close of the performance. He had kept distressingly sober—this distraction was sufficient. He did not often want a woman and whisky at the same time.

"You are coming to my rooms to-night," he said to her, as Leslie put the finishing touches to her street costume.

"Your rooms!" Leslie repeated, aghast. Her thoughts flew to her own home, and for an instant she forgot the part she played. *"Your home?"*

"Why, certainly, my home," answered the man, puzzled. "You realize that I have to live somewhere, don't you?"

His light tone gave her food for reflection, fleeting though it was, and she divined what kind of a home Algy meant.

A wild curiosity surged over her to see him stripped of respectability in "his home," so she raised her chin ever so little and whispered:

"You are a ver' naughty boy!"

They drove to a handsome house, which seemed to contain five apartments. A man opened the door

and bowed deferentially as they passed through the rather dimly lighted hall.

Algy led the way to the elevator. The stillness was oppressive, and Leslie's teeth chattered, though not with cold. Suddenly the realization of the game she played came to her, and she turned faint. What was the end going to be? If Algy found her out—what then? If not—*what then?*

"Here we are!" His voice behind her, had a strange exultant ring, and she turned, half frightened, to him."

"I don't t'ink I want to go," she murmured, drawing back.

"You cruel little tease," he took her forcibly in his arms and pushed her into the room, then closed the door with an ominous click. They were alone.

"I see we have a bite of supper ready," Algy was saying, with a laughable housewifely pride. "Come, Mignon, and let us be happy—for to-morrow——"

"Yes," she whispered, "to-morrow——"

"There is no to-morrow where you are!" Tressidar cried. "Let it always be to-night."

Presently she calmed him sufficiently to persuade him to eat a little of the supper prepared for them. He ate to please her, pretending to be horrified at her voracious appetite. But he drank more than was good for him, and very soon showed the effect of the wine. He could not let her alone, insisting that she should sit on his knee and finish her supper, he kept his hands constantly on her heavy

black wig, and rubbed his lips reslessly over her bare shoulders.

"Do you love me, Celeste?" he asked, again and again.

"Mais, non!" Leslie answered each time. "You are a—how do you say—a bully."

"Only because I love you so. Listen, never in all my life have I gone absolutely crazy about a woman, as I am about you; do you know what that means? Do you?" he asked again, giving her a little shake.

"How do I know?" the woman answered provocatively. "I don't know you, who are your frien's or anysing. For all I know you may be marry wiz some lovely girl."

It was a bold stroke, but Tressidar was equal to it.

"Let us not speak of me, dear one," he murmured, pulling her head back on his arm and laying his lips full upon hers, "let us speak of you. *Will you come to me?"*

"Ciel, non, I tell you! Stay in dis noisy New York just for you!"

"God, don't speak to me like that, Celeste," he cried, drawing her roughly to him, "you *shall* come, I say—I want you!"

Leslie struggled a moment. Uppermost was the fear that her wig would get dislodged, and Algy would discover the fraud. She thought of the English boy, beating on her door, crying: *"Drag* her! I will have her!"

"You are hurt me," she moaned, with half-closed eyes and lips apart. "Don't Elgy!"

"Kiss me," he murmured. "Kiss me, and kiss me, and *kiss me!*"

As he again laid his lips on hers a revulsion of feeling surged over Leslie, and she bit him hard.

With a cry Tressidar struggled to his feet, still holding her almost powerless in his grasp.

"You are mine," he muttered, hoarsely through clenched teeth, and the look of passion combined with drink, made Leslie deathly ill. "You *are* mine, this instant, and always! Some men win through love, some through conquest, and the latter course is surest. Conquest for me!"

His words fell thickly, but with hideous import. The time of their childhood quarrel occurred to her in exaggerated manner—she could hear the boy's voice trembling with passion, screaming: "Drag her, drag her!"

"Let me go," cried the girl, frightened at the certainty of her own illness. *Algy!*"

As he dragged her to him with brutal roughness, too intoxicated to stand, he stumbled, and partly loosened his hold. The woman fell limp and inert against the corner of the table causing a crash of china and glass. She lay motionless on the floor, her cheeks showing white and pinched under the rouge, her eyes, darkened artificially, showed pitiful shadows of their own, and underneath a mass of inky curls peeped out a strand of sun-kissed hair.

Algy, fascinated, stooped unsteadily closer, then sank trembling to his knees. With shaking fingers he pulled the wig aside, and stared.

"My God!" he gasped. "Lit'le Lady, 's you? *My* God, what have I done?"

CHAPTER VI.

Clara Bryce was pronounced hopelessly insane, and sent to an asylum at Walter's request.

Since Miss Libby's death some weeks earlier, the lonely sister had a hard struggle with Clara and the children both to care for. Miss Libby had been such a help, so loving and thoughtful; Miss Polly had usually attended to the cares of housekeeping entirely, and the preparing of such odd dishes as appealed to Clara's wavering fancy; Miss Libby took charge of the children and kept a patient watch over their erratic mother. Yet patient soul that she was, Miss Polly wept bitterly at having to part with any of her burden, for that Clara certainly was.

Vera Burnley came to see her the afternoon that Clara left.

"Miss Polly, I want you to let me have at least one of the children to take back to the country with me, until things get adjusted a little more smoothly, won't you?"

"Oh, my dear," Miss Polly almost gasped, and fingered the hem of her handkerchief nervously, "I am so grateful to you, but really—well, you see the truth is, that little Walter has a cold, and

Clarie is so particular about the way her food is made, almost worse than Clara. I don't believe she would really benefit by the change; and, of course, the baby is out of the question; so Vera, my dear, I don't see how I could spare any of them."

For once Miss Polly was selfish, her heart was so bruised by the events—the losses of the last few weeks, she could not bear to part with any of the children whom she held so dear.

"Then come yourself and bring them!" Vera clapped her hands with the joyful abandonment of a happy child. She was the kind of person who made the fallacious fountain of youth a glorious reality.

"Oh, Vera," Miss Polly half reeled at the suggestion; to be away in the country at Vera's beautiful home and with the dear children—it was like a dream! Suddenly, she checked herself and the light died out of her face.

"No, I cannot do that, either, though you can never know how I appreciate your kindness, Vera, dear. You see"—she lowered her voice from habit—"you see, there is Walter."

Mrs. George Burnley boldly snorted.

"Miss Polly," she exclaimed impatiently, "what of it? You don't do him any good by staying; in fact, perhaps he would be glad to have the house all to himself—quiet, you know," she added hastily, warned by the look on Miss Bryce's face.

"No, no, you are wrong! Walter likes to have us here, and I know he would miss us, especially

the children, he is very fond of the children, you know," she said, with averted eyes, stroking the baby's hair.

"But Miss Polly, think of the immense benefit to all of you. Please come!"

"I really couldn't leave Walter, my love. You see," she hesitated again, and a painful flush crept over her delicate skin; Vera wondered what was coming. One could always double Miss Polly's words, then multiply them by three times the wickedness and still not have the sum total of Walter's villiany. She knew from George that quite lately he had stolen some of his aunt's silver, and sold it.

"You see," Miss Polly said, "he seems to have become rather infatuated—of course, for the moment only—with an actress." Her voice dropped still lower, and she drew the baby, seated on her lap, close to her with a sweet protective gesture. Vera nodded sympathetically.

"She is the understudy, I believe that is what you call them, to that woman who set New York crazy some weeks ago."

"Celeste?" asked Vera, in astonishment.

Miss Polly nodded. "At first he was quite insane about *her,* but after she had the quarrel with her managers or whatever it was, and left the country, Walter veered around to the new one. You know, my dear, he really is nothing but a boy," she plead for him apologetically.

There was silence.

"Do you think she would marry him?" asked

Miss Polly at last in trembling tones, "they sometimes are very glad to make respectable matches."

With difficulty Vera kept composed. At first she wanted to make an indignant protest, then she wanted to laugh, and finally she wanted very much to cry. Marry Walter Bryce to make a respectable match. Oh. *Oh!*

"No, Miss Polly, I am sure she *won't,* don't worry a tiny bit, there's a dear."

"You are such a comfort, Vera, and how much like poor Leslie you are! You see, I thought particularly of the dear children. Have you seen Leslie, lately? She has not been here for some time, and I really don't care about going there."

Miss Polly and her sister had never been able to reconcile themselves to Leslie's marriage with "that Mr. Tressidar," laying the entire blame upon him for Walter's wayward course. And, perhaps, they were right, too; certainly he had not a restraining influence, and whenever the siren called and Algy wanted "to drink," he was always sure of a companion in young Bryce.

"I am going to see Leslie now," Vera said, rising. "Are you sure you won't change your mind and come, all or some of you?"

"Quite sure, dearie, just now," replied the other, kissing her affectionately. "But thank you from the bottom of my heart, and please give poor Leslie my love."

Vera got into her car slowly, she was genuinely disappointed at Miss Polly's refusal, and was half

debating whether to ask Walter for the sake of the others, or not. "I think I had better wait and ask George," she said to herself, frowning. "To Miss Crowley's first."

Margaret was at home busily engaged in writing a paper for Herbert Carter. She looked up, smiling as Vera unceremoniously entered her study, and laid the sheets of paper aside.

"This is a pleasant surprise," she said, kissing her guest.

"Thank you, my dear. That seems to be my vocation—being a surprise to my friends. It is just as well, I don't complain. Will you come over to Leslie's with me, Margaret? I haven't seen her for an age?"

"I can't very well go this afternoon," Miss Crowley answered, "this paper must be finished to-night, for Mr. Carter wants me to read it, before a meeting to-morrow. Would you and Leslie not like to come? I should like Mr. Tressidar to come, too"—she stopped and busied herself with the papers a moment—"if by any chance it should appeal to him, he might derive some help from it. I have always claimed that the main trouble with men of his type is a lack of occupation. He needs good, wholesome work."

"I should love hearing you 'speak a piece,' Margaret," cried the guest enthusiastically, "simply love it! I imagine that you done up in tartan skirts with a wreath of daisies on your hair, saying, 'You can scarce expect one of my age to speak

in public, on the stage,'" she laughed delightedly. "I remember at Madame's, you always chose frivolous selections, such as Grey's Elegy, and that thing of Scott's, 'Breathes there a man with soul so dead,' or 'Life is real, life is earnest.' Heavens, Margaret Crowley, I can't see why you don't sink a crushed and mangled heap, under your own seriousness."

Margaret smiled almost wanly. "I have always wished to be like you and Leslie," she said.

"Oh, Leslie," Vera exclaimed. "Dear knows, she would have gone crazy, I expect, if she had not been endowed with the gift of frivolity. That is the worst of caring so much for a man. Of course, you can't understand that Margaret, especially in the case of Algy Tressidar. I know you well enough though to appreciate your views on the subject—you are so good and lofty."

And because she was engrossed as usual, in her own happy thoughts, she did not see the peculiar look which came over Margaret Crowley's face at the mention of his name, nor did she note anything out of the ordinary in her voice, as she answered:

"Oh, I don't know!"

CHAPTER VII.

There are some houses which, when nicely decorated and furnished, remain the same to all beholders, and under all conditions. If they are of the large, commodious, simply elegant variety, any "dressing up" appears bizarre and out of place, and additional elegance destroys the artistic simplicity so desirable.

If they are of the light, airy, and beruffled variety, great care must be observed lest they assume an overdressed and shoddy appearance. There is a kind of house, however, which has possibilities. It strikes the happy medium between these two. Wise young brides with artistic proclivities, also economic, seek diligently for a house which, in its simplicity is attractive and comfortable, but which responds feelingly to any additional touches.

At Christmas, when John sends home a Chippendale table and a few odd brasses, the drawing-room, looks, *feels* better, though it had not looked bare before, and it does not look cluttered now. A vase of flowers in the living room gives it quite a different air, a new picture seems to call attention to its presence, as a handsome piece of fur, often makes a woman's costume.

Leslie Tressidar greatly resembled this sort of a house. Every "fixing" told. Angelique Brabazon had once said that there was no limit to her attractiveness for each touch enhanced it, distractingly. Just when she thought herself fully dressed, and well groomed, it occurred to her that the angle of her hat might be improved, or the position of a spot in her veil changed to advantage, or the height of a collar lessened.

It was astonishing but true that she responded to every care, given herself. And for that reason, Ceciley was invaluable. Leslie might have grown careless, and relaxed her constant attention in little things. But Ceciley never allowed her mistress to simply put her clothes on; that was the least part of Leslie's dressing. In another woman this extra fussing would have made no difference, would have given no results, in Leslie, it made her.

Osmonde, the modiste, had once said, "Mlle. Loring has the making of a good figure," and Ceciley remembered that. Certainly in the two weeks after Leslie's mad trick she worked as hard as ever in her life to keep her looking well. Lying white and weak in bed, haunted by the fear that Algy would think her ugly, unattractive, she taxed her maid's patience and ingenuity to the utmost.

"Can't you bring me something more becoming, Ceciley? Just see how deathly white I look, and my hair seems to be all on one side. Pull it out, or push it in, put a black patch on, or do something! Don't let me look a fright, for Heaven's sake!"

And at last Ceciley, in desperation, answered:

"Well, you are sick, Miss Leslie, *that* makes the difference! People don't usually look the same when they are sick as when they are well."

"Oh, there is the fatal point, my dear," answered Algy's wife sadly. "They let themselves look sick, almost repulsive; because they feel weak, or are suffering, they expect others to know how they feel, by the way they look, and by looking ill, they elicit sympathy and affection. It is a mistake. People are drawn to pretty things, not white, wan, weak, and puny ones. I, myself, as sympathetic as I am, want to hurry by the cots in a hospital, whose patients look as though they were at death's door. I am *so* sorry that I ache for them, and duly show my suffering, not sympathy or cheerfulness—I am afraid of them—afraid that I won't be tender enough—I infect them with nervousness. I don't want to look ill, do you hear—Mr. Tressidar would be bored to death, if he thought I were really ill."

The maid kept silent, she feared her mistress was correct, though so far Algy had not seemed bored. Since the night he brought her home in his arms, he had been more like a lover than since the first month of his marriage. He spent most of his time in Leslie's room, and was untiring in his attentions. They had talked long and earnestly almost the whole of the following day, and many times Ceciley had heard him say, "If I only knew you would forgive me, Little Lady—if I only could *feel* it. I was utterly mad, mad!"

Sometimes he would sit beside her on the bed, silent, his arm about her, his cheek against her hair. Then suddenly with a motion of fierceness, he would clasp her in his arms, and murmur:

"To think I might have lost you—my brave, plucky, Little Lady!"

And Leslie, panting and white, lay perfectly still, with a divine happiness written plainly on her pale face.

When she felt able to get up, Ceciley and Loring went to Edgeville and Algy suggested a trip on the continent, "a real honeymoon," he said, but Leslie, for some reason, did not seem anxious to go. So they stayed on in town, thinking each day that they would come to some decision, the next. Although she said nothing to her husband, Leslie felt at times, seriously alarmed about her condition. The pain about her heart was frightful, contracting her features, sometimes, and causing a faintness quite as bad as that which came with the other sort of illness. Her eyes naturally large, looked uncanny and unearthly, shadowed by such dark circles as now surrounded them. Her lips usually red and full, seemed shrunken and colorless and worse, they seemed to have a blue look around them. So one afternoon she sent for a physician.

After a careful examination he looked at her curiously.

"Have you had a fall recently, Mrs. Tressidar?" he asked.

"A fall?" she repeated. "Why, no, not that I know of."

"You have not struck you side, then, in any way?"

Suddenly she remembered that night, downtown with Algy. The picture of the softly lighted room, the glittering table, his own face, came vividly to her, and she lived again through a moment of deadly nausea and faintness.

"Yes, I do remember falling," she said slowly. "I struck myself against the corner of a table when I fainted."

"Oh!" The doctor's tone was intended to imply merely, "I thought something of the kind must have happened," but it implied all of that and a great deal more to his patient's sensitive ears.

"Tell me all about it, Dr. Graham," said Leslie, laying her hand on his arm. "You physicians have grave responsibilities, I know, but you can hardly decide a woman's future, can you? You can hardly feel it right to hide from a thinking person something which they should know, can you? Now, if you don't tell me truthfully, what I ask you, perhaps you may do me more harm, in giving my imagination free scope to conjure up what horrors it will, for I know something serious is the matter. Will you tell me what it is?"

"Child," answered the man kindly, "you have spoken very wisely. It *is* often a problem to know just how much to tell a person, and how little. Knowing you as I do—I waive my responsibility in this instance and put it all on your shoulders,

my dear." He cleared his throat. "Apparently, you have what we call pulmonary oedema, as a result of broken compensation of the heart. It has been caused by a severe bruise. A fall, such as you describe, would cause it."

"And——" Leslie suggested.

"Well, that is all."

"Oh, no, you have left out the most important thing. How long have I to live?"

The doctor looked at the face before him, glowing softly in it's golden frame. He looked about the luxurious surroundings. Leslie was always luxurious; the girls at Madame's used to say she looked as though she had been born in a pair of fine silk stockings with a package of delicate sachet in one hand, and a piece of expensive jewelry in the other. The costly things of life seemed to be a part of her, carriages, servants, fine raiment and the like.

He remembered her as a young girl, her glowing health, her radiant vitality, and his mind quickly skimmed these past years, since her marriage. Not what he would call "broken," he grasped the significance of the present nervousness, as it told upon her looks and movements. There was such a vast difference between the impulsive exuberance of long ago and the spasmodic effort toward animation now; such a difference between the calmness which comes of a peace and satisfaction with life and living, and the strained effort for self-control. Dr.

Graham knew from Miss Polly Bryce something of Leslie's trial.

Looking around the room and back to the earnest face confronting him, he coughed slightly behind his hand, said, "pardon me," and relapsed into silence.

"Well?"

"One can't say just how long *anything,* my dear," he heard his own voice speaking in tones of forced carelessness, "Perhaps a year——"

"A year?" The words were echoed almost gladly. There would be a year of such joy, ahead! A whole year in which to watch, to glory in, Algy's complete reform. For, had he not sworn a solemn oath, in broken-hearted seriousness, that as long as he lived he would never touch another drop of anything intoxicating? He had never gone that far before, he never seemed so much in earnest, and Leslie believed in him. This time he wanted to stop. "Oh, I was afraid you would say a month," she said, in an explanatory manner; and the doctor, feeling that he gazed upon something almost sacred, did not tell Mrs. Tressidar, he had intended to say, "A year—more or less."

CHAPTER VIII.

Vera stayed all night in town, so that she and Leslie could hear Margaret's paper, on the following day. Sitting in the crowded hall, they were reminded of the afternoon years ago when they listened to Herbert Carter's first address in New York.

"Margaret is a wonderful woman," said Leslie, thoughtfully. "To me she has nothing in her life, and yet she is so calm, and reliable, and sure; and she seems happy, doesn't she impress you that way, Vera?"

"Oh, yes, quite; though, of course, she would probably be just the same if she were not."

"Still one can always tell. I think she must miss the country and her beloved rose garden, this summer."

Vera laughed.

"She has 'meetings' and her adored *Herb* garden instead," she said.

Margaret Crowley arranged some notes and spoke:

"I smile when I think of the shriek of protest this feeble article will raise, when I boldly announce that it is a plea for *More Work!* As a side issue,

it deals with the possible solution of the Servant Question.

More work, mind you, does not apply to the abortive creations, born, reared, and smothered in sweat-shops—it pertains to those aristocratic ladies and gentlemen, who consider themselves exempt from work—Home work—either by reason of blue blood, riches, or simply plain ignorance.

Whence comes that barbaric idea, fostered so tenderly through centuries, that an aristocrat's hand may not be stained by Manual Labor? I ask for information—I don't know, unless it comes from China, where even to-day, those of high degree, cultivate an abnormal growth of the finger nails; and the higher the degree, the longer the nails. In a recent magazine there appeared a picture of a prince whose finger nails touched the floor, when his hand rested upon a table. Needless to say, he was absolutely helpless for fear of breaking his emblem of princeliness, and it is a thing for which we may well be thankful, that All-Wise Providence in His noble dispensation, did not dispense any more of these cartilage cultivators than China can conveniently handle.

However, to resume; most manual labor is done by women—at least, there is very little they have not done—if not in this country, elsewhere. Women plow, women reap, women harvest; they do, in short, all the hardest labor, yet man in his selfishness, begrudges them a seat in his easy berth, and grumbles about a reduction in his wage because

of woman's encroachment upon his sphere. He won't help her do her work, and does not like having her try his. Pray what is his sphere? Who shall say, "This is man's work—*This* is woman's?"

One hundred years ago, a woman lifted up her voice and pleaded for Women's Rights. Thousands read her words to-day which seem a little common place, only because we are becoming accustomed to this heinous usurping of man's rights, and deem it no wonder that women teach in our schools, practice law and medicine, aye, even stand in our pulpits.

But this is not manual labor—true—which brings us back to the starting point. Socialists claim that in four hours out of the twenty-four all the necessary work of the world could be done, provided *every one* worked. The rest of the day could then be given over to pleasure (which should be merely a different form of work). But every one does not work four hours, or even one, so that the result is plainly—some people work all the time, and some—never.

The survival of the fittest? Not at all. There are hard working, earnest young men crowding the offices of New York City, who are eminently more fitted for a week-end trip up the Hudson, than the smug financier who employs them; and the same applies to the mistress and the maid.

A caller was once heard to remark, "I don't see how you get along with that Eliza of yours, she is so dreadfully superior, and really, she uses words, the meaning of which I haven't the slightest idea."

The hostess found it difficult to refrain from answering that for a conversation worth while, Eliza was a far more preferable vis-a-vis than her velveted and ermined caller.

The common cry is for less work—the examples are too numerous to mention. On the road, in the mines, in offices, in the home, there is the same horror of work.

Dealing particularly with woman's side of the question—the home has become an unlovely burden because it's name spells drudgery. Girls and women flock to offices that they may escape from the home and it's work, or, possibly, earn enough to hire some one else to do it. Each one shirks her share.

And the Hired One? She usually occupies the position of a necessary automaton to her mistress. Far more work is expected of her than two hands can *happily* do, and if she ventures a protest, she is asked what she *does* expect to do, to earn her money. Taking it all in all, the relations between mistress and maid are generally hostile. Each one struggles to keep the other in the prescribed orbit known as her "place." One expects more than the other can do, and the other does as little as possible to escape dismissal. There come times when the Hired One boldly demands a day off, and the mistress tells her friends how ungrateful and inconsiderate servants are; she has not dared to refuse, for fear of losing her link between these and the slave days.

Women usually feel that they have all they can manage on their shoulders—and this is where the men come in.

How many men help, one atom, in their own homes? How many husbands, on Sunday morning, go downstairs and get a bite of breakfast (and clear it up) for the wife who has done that much and so much more for him, the other six days? Further, how many men *ever* pick up a newspaper, or put the ashes from cigarette, cigar, or pipe where they belong? These are the foolish little trifles, but they make more work—ah, *needless* work for the wife, mother, or sister, who has the care of the home as her portion.

Wait on yourself in little things—the big ones will become easy. Do the work near at hand!

A lady who decorated the top notch of Society was seen downtown at a remarkably early hour. On being twitted about it she replied, "Oh, I have my household moving in the proper grooves, at last. *I* go downtown and buy stocks, while Edward goes to market!"

Well, then, if men helped the women, and mistresses helped their maids, proportionately the work would be lessened and the drudgery would disappear.

Joyless labor would be transformed into joyful work, and the prayer would be for greater capacity, instead of immunity and inability.

Rest simply means change of work. This applies to the women of the land who have a glim-

mer of their usefulness, their heritage of power; not to the unenviable puppets of fashion, who have no thought save of "Society," and who have establishments—not Homes, to live in.

A certain doctor asserts that he can work with ease for eighteen hours. This *is* a little strenuous, but realize what he means. He probably does a dozen different things during the eighteen hours, some of which are usually termed "pleasure."

The main point is *Get at it!* Don't dawdle. In reading a novel, dusting the den, cooking the dinner, washing the dishes—concentrate!

Who has so little time as the idler, and who makes so many excuses? Only the busy person ever has time—all of which is due to concentration and a love—cultivated or natural, for work.

If, Utopia being at hand, immunity from work meant perfection in it, everything would smoothly run. Before she would become the mistress of half a dozen maids, the woman must have perfected herself in every branch of their work. There would still be time for education and self-instruction in the Fine Arts, for education is largely a matter of desire. The maids employed would realize their limitations and understand how to reach the coveted goal; while the men—another article must be devoted to the men, who, after all are the ones most in need of kindergartening, and on whom so much of happiness depends.

In the language of one of the greatest writers of the day, "God help the rich, the poor can Work."

Vera and Leslie looked at each other in astonishment, during the applause which marked the closing of the paper.

"She is getting perfectly skittish," exclaimed Vera soberly. "I must look into this."

"Hush! There is Mr. Carter," warned Leslie, "he evidently is much pleased, just look at the beam on his countenance."

"The paper to which you have just listened," he began, with an appreciative glance in Margaret's direction, "contained among its other sober truths, the greatest one—the greatest factor in life to-day, if I may so put it. I refer to the implied cause of so much hostility between all phases of our social system—the amount of cupidity, existing, the graft —the breaking up of the home—*Less work.* It is obvious that we would not be happier working along lines which are odious and uncongenial, but there are notable examples of men, who work for the love of it, such as John Wanamaker, who, with all his millions, accepted the position of postmaster at a salary of $8,000 a year. He did not want the money. The railroad magnates are born, not made, and under the new regime, they would work for salaries, not huge profits, just the same—for the love of that work. An instance of distribution of labor occurs to me now. I was one of a party who went off camping for six weeks. We did not go entirely for pleasure, but our work was comparatively easy and light. There was no organization of the camp before starting, and the men in dis-

cussing the matter, agreed that we would share the work equally, that is, each one, in turn, would do the same piece of work. One day I would draw the water, and Jones would cook, while Smith took measurements and wrote, Brown would cut the wood, and Boyle would 'clear up'—an inelegant term applied to the keeping of a camp in sanitary condition. We tried this plan with indifferent success for two weeks or so, until each one had a taste of the other one's job. Then one day Smith and Jones came to me, and said:

"'Look here, Mr. Carter, you seem able to manage this ranch, all right, and it's more than we can do. Suppose you let me draw all the water, and let Smith, here, do the cooking; I might say that Boyle hates work of any clerical variety, much preferring to sit in the woods and smoke, so he would be perfectly willing to cut all the wood, and keep the fires going."

"There is the system in a nut shell, my friends. The men voluntarily chose their work, and did it happily. I might say that it was a very enjoyable six weeks, which I spent hundreds of miles from this seething caldron of misery and unhappiness."

The four friends left the hall together. Something in Margaret's manner made Leslie look at her curiously. Then, unconsciously, she glanced at Herbert Carter, who was talking to Vera. Margaret, seeing the look grew crimson, and laughed embarrassedly.

Leslie squeezed her arm.

"Really?" she asked, with a beaming smile.

"Oh, some time," answered the other. "We are too old to rush headlong into matrimony."

"Oh, Margaret dear, I'm so excited! Let's tell Vera!"

"No, no, not now, please. We are not even sure of anything, but this one common bond—our work."

"Well, what else can you want?" asked Leslie lightly.

"Love," said Margaret, with so much feeling that it did not seem to have come from her at all. "*Love,*" she repeated, then stopped, and grew as white as she had been pink before.

Leslie looked up in surprise, and saw her husband coming toward them.

CHAPTER IX.

"There is a lady to see you, Mrs. Tressidar, she has been waiting some time."

Leslie pulled off her gloves slowly, dropping one as she walked. It was an old trick of hers, and one which each new man learned with difficulty. He usually made the mistake of handing the glove at once to his mistress. This was an error. She did not want it—she did not want to be reminded that it had been dropped—just why, no one knew. Why, any habit? She loved to walk through the square hall with its polished floors, covered here and there by oriental rugs, of soft, almost indefinite hues, through the high arch leading into the drawing-room, a symphony in green and silver—she loved to sweep through here uninterrupted by any butlers or maids, or even Loring. Leslie walked well, and she knew it.

This afternoon, after dropping her glove as usual, she passed slowly through the door, and into her drawing-room. The blinds were drawn and by the dim light Leslie discerned a small fair woman sitting in an attitude of nervous tension in the far corner of the room.

Coming from the strong glare outside, Mrs. Tres-

sidar was glad of the intervening space between her and her visitor, so she trailed slowly toward the centre of the room.

"You wish to see me?"

"Mrs. Tressidar?"

Becoming more accustomed to the dimness Leslie made out the features of the girl who had risen and was standing before her. Younger than she had at first supposed, there was a look of suffering on the pale face seldom seen in one of her age, the kind of suffering which comes from wounds inflicted by the living and from which there is no escape; time, mercifully eases pain and longing for those departed from this life. She was dressed almost shabbily, but wore her clothes with the air of an aristocrat, and she seemed, despite her nervousness, perfectly at home in these surroundings. Leslie was a little puzzled by her manner, which implied either an antagonism to herself, a disliking for the errand upon which she was bent, or a childish embarrassment and shyness.

"I am Mrs. Tressidar," she said in her most sympathetic, winning manner; "won't you sit down?"

The two women seated themselves; the one with easy, languid grace, the other with unbending rigidity. There was silence, and the tension grew uncomfortable.

Suddenly Leslie bent forward.

"You are in trouble," she said softly, "what can I do to help?"

With difficulty the girl spoke, she seemed confused.

"You make it very hard for me," her voice came through trembling lips and was husky, "everything is hard for me—about you, I mean," she continued enigmatically. "I did not know it would be like this."

All at once, Leslie caught her breath in what sounded like a quick, indrawn sigh. She had often noticed a queer catching of her breath lately, and at times it annoyed her greatly. She was not accustomed to "having things."

Her unerring intuitive sense warned her that this visit had to do with Algy, and her eyes contracted with pain.

"I have the certainty, now that I see you"—the girl's voice found something of steadiness—"of knowing that if I don't begin right, you will not let me finish, and all these years will have been in vain. I am rather tired and not quite well, and my brain will not work as it should. I am nervous, Mrs. Tressidar, because I am afraid."

The voice trailed off in a whisper, and once more the room was very still.

"You feel obliged to tell me?" Leslie asked, at last.

"Oh, yes!" There was the note of a wounded bird, in the cry. "Listen"—leaving her seat, and slipping to the floor beside her, the girl spoke rapidly, tensely, "my name is Sue-Leigh Harmon—you don't easily forget a name like that, do you? neither

does any one else. My parents went to India, when I was quite a little girl, and I lived there until—until—lately." She drew her handkerchief out of her sleeve and rubbed it hard across her face. "We are not exactly of the aristocracy, Mrs. Tressidar, but more than just 'respectable,' and I was well educated, and brought up."

Her eyes were a pitiful challenge, and Leslie nodded silently, almost dreading to look full at her.

"When I was eighteen I went into the hospital to train as a nurse, and after a year there, during which I got on far beyond my expectations, we had a bad season, and the wards began to fill appallingly fast with enteric patients. Although I should not have had charge of a patient under ordinary circumstances, owing to the demand for nurses, and my efficiency, I was given the night duty, on a case. The patient was your husband."

Again that irritating catch in her breath made Leslie move her head from side to side and raise her chin as though she craved more air. Softly the girl spoke.

"You are not surprised?"

"No, I rather expected that was coming. Go on, please."

"You who know him so well, can imagine him ill, helpless, suffering. Every nurse in the hospital soon got to know him, they had to be reprimanded for neglecting the other patients in order to perform some slight service for him. It was a pleasure to

even speak to him, and by and by when he was out of danger and the time for his departure drew near, the girls united in the one great ambition—that of becoming Mrs. Algy Tressidar."

For an instant, her eyes clouded and she spoke bitterly. Leslie was conscious of wishing to take a more comfortable chair, it seemed tiresome to sit so rigidly, she did not realize that every muscle was strained and taut, and that her nails cut into her palm.

"Of course I loved him, too. He said he loved me, that he owed his life to me, and that it was mine to do with as I pleased." She laughed with a great dry sob in her throat. "I believed him because I was innocent of the ways of men, and when he finally left the hospital, *I went, too,* do you understand?"

"Poor little girl!"

"We lived in an adorable bungalow way off in the hills; he had got leave for six months, and instead of going home to England, he hid with me. Realize what I did? Perhaps, I have forgotten, I only know I was happy, because I had him."

The hunger, the passion, the anguish made Leslie faint and again she moved her head and tried to breath comfortably.

"Then he went away, left me one day, and did not come back. I got a letter weeks after, saying that he was not worthy of me, that he was 'drinking,' and couldn't stop, advising me to go back to the hospital and take up my old work of mercy.

God, oh, my God, what a letter! And it was not many months after that his child was born!"

"Oh!" Leslie tried to draw her hand from the convulsive clasp of the girl who held it. She could see the whole thing so vividly, it almost made her feel as though she had been Sue-Leigh Harmon, and had suffered this supreme anguish.

"And then?" she whispered.

"Then I left the child in India and tried to follow him. Not for revenge," she cried, interpreting the look of astonishment on Leslie's white face, "no, no, for love of him, blind, unchanging love of him. Just to be near him, to hear his voice—God, Mrs. Tressidar!" her voice rose wild and shrill, "I suppose you wonder why I didn't kill myself!" In a moment she grew more calm. "I followed him from place to place, sometimes being in the same town and not knowing it until too late. Always there were women and whisky, always there was a woman. Some of the time I was starving. I begged and sang in the streets after leaving that hideous country, I lived by other ways—anything would do to give me money that I might reach him. In Paris I almost died, there seemed no clue. By writing to England I found that he was not at home, as far as my information went, he had been disinherited and had gone to America. Very well, I said, I will go to America, also. But where?"

She stopped speaking, and seemed to look back upon a horror-laden past.

"Then one day a queer thing happened. An artist

picked me out of the street; he said I was just the model for his picture called "Yearning." Later, when it was finished some people came to the studio to see it, and among them was an English woman whom he called Miss Fairborough. Did you ever hear of her?"

Leslie shook her head.

"I know next to nothing of my husband's past," she said slowly.

"No matter, she was part of it, I know. Mr. Claymore, the artist, insisted on bringing me out that they might see me, and in moving past an easel to inspect me better (that was the air of the whole party) Miss Fairborough caught her chain, and it snapped. In stooping to pick it up, the locket which hung on the end flew open, and whose face looked out into mine—whose? Algy Tressidar's! I fainted, and when I came to myself, they had all gone. Then I told Mr. Claymore the whole story, and while he advised—begged me, to give up my search, he promised to help me when I showed how bent I was upon continuing it. Just how he found out so much I will never know, but I came over here at his expense—and nothing more," she added triumphantly, "and—I find you."

The whole scene had been dramatic, but Leslie was too disturbed to notice it. She felt alternately nervously alive and dumbly stupid—it must be a dream, one always felt dazed in a dream.

"You wonder what I want? I thought I wanted to ask you to give him back to me. I was not sure

when I left Havre that he was really married (Miss Fairborough did not think he would ever marry), and then I wanted to beg, shamelessly beg! Ah, Mrs. Tressidar, perhaps I am not sane—I don't doubt it, to have fallen so low. But at least I should like to be rid of men, and their wolfish desires, and I am starving here."

"Oh, my poor child," Leslie's voice throbbed, and she made as though to rise. "My poor, poor girl!"

"Wait; that is not all. I want to see him, I want to hear him speak, not to me, of course—ah, no! I am not as mad as that—but to you, or perhaps," she hesitated, "to your child. Have you a child?"

Choking, the other bowed her head, and, pushing the girl aside, rang the bell. When it's summons was answered she gave an order in a low voice and stood beside the door, waiting. In a few moments after writing something on a slip of paper, Leslie recrossed the drawing-room and laid her hand upon the bowed head, speaking softly:

"I want you to take this check to the address I have written here. Mr. Crowley will give you all the money now, or will arrange to send it to you, as you wish. He will ask no questions. You will not have to be identified. I am only bitterly sorry there is no more I can do. Money is but a poor consolation for a bleeding heart."

"Your very goodness makes me writhe," said Sue-Leigh Harmon, with streaming eyes. "I have not spoken to a woman for so long. Oh," she gasped, in astonishment. "I can't let you give

me this. Why, it is a small fortune! Take it back!"

Leslie put her hands behind her, and shook her head. "I don't need it," she said. "Some one left me a large sum of money at one time, strangely prophesying that there would come a time in my life when I would need a sum of money for a specific purpose. There will never come an hour when I want it more than now. As I say, it is a poor substitute for the love you crave."

And suddenly she succumbed to an impulse of divine pity, and, taking the bruised creature in her arms, she kissed her.

There was a step in the hall, and the two drew apart quickly. "Stay where you are," whispered Leslie, "he will not see you. God bless you, and good-by!"

"Is that you, Algy?" she asked, in almost a natural voice, walking swiftly into the hall.

"The very same, Little Lady," Tressidar answered lightly. "Why, are you not going to kiss me?"

"No, it is too warm," was the indolent answer.

"Oh, very well," more indifferently than indolently, "only *I* am going to kiss *you*." He strode forward and took his wife in his arms. "Kiss me, sweetheart," he whispered, bending over her.

"Algy," cried Leslie, "put me down, quickly! I'm fainting!"

CHAPTER X.

"Will you see Count de Vinville, Madame?"

Leslie lay inert and weak upon a rose-covered couch, in her dressing room. She was wondering whether or not to send for Ceciley to come back from Edgeville. Since the afternoon of the girl's visit she had found it hard to keep up, and the haunting fear that she would bore Algy and send him off to break his word and her heart, never left her. She contrived pitifully tender little devices by which she could keep him at home in the evenings. Sometimes she would put a note on his dressing table, which he would see while changing for dinner, asking him to call upon Mlle. Fifi at nine o'clock. At a few moments before that time she would run upstairs and dress herself in some dainty costume, indicative of her part, and they would play like children at a masquerade. Another time she would be a Japanese, as far as costume would permit, and would insist upon Algy's sitting on the floor and drinking tea from diminutive cups. Again there would be the alluring inscription:

"The Pixies have got me," and then Algy knew that it was to be an evening of lovable pranks and jokes such as no one but Leslie could devise. He

did not realize that all day while he was out or asleep she was thinking out these little plots, and that she kept up while with him only; that the instant she was alone she became limp and listless.

"Will you see Count de Vinville?"

Since the episode with Celeste Mignon, Leslie had loathed the Count inexpressibly, as only a highly honorable nature could loathe such a deceptive one. She did not see the Count's point of view. She did not know that he thought her unhappy with Tressidar, and lacking only sufficient excuse to leave him; she did not give him credit for such a lasting and absorbing passion for herself. Her position was a little difficult in regard to the Frenchman, not wishing to antagonize him further (this last act looked like a cowardly revenge for her refusal of him), she did not want to overlook his part, nor encourage his attentions, not only upon her account, but upon Algy's. As a mother watches the associates of her children, so Leslie looked at the Count and said, "contact with him is not good for Algy."

He rarely alluded to his attachment for her, but a wise woman can read more from a man's looks in a crowded ballroom than a foolish one can in a moonlit garden. It was the intensity of the Count's love that Leslie discredited. She probably thought him flirtatious with all women.

"I wonder whether New York is agreeing with

you?" he said, as he took her hand. "You look a little white."

"That is not like the usual stream of compliments which pours from your lips," she answered lightly; "the heat always saps me."

"Then why not get out of it?"

"A woman's reason—just because."

"Oh, if *that* is the case, of course I have nothing more to say."

"You sound like George Burnley," said Leslie, laughing.

"Thank you, Madame, that is indeed a compliment. May I ask where is your good husband?"

"Downtown, I believe." The answer was not as indifferently spoken as she could have wished. Although fully persuaded that this time she believed in Algy, the door never opened, nor did the telephone ring that her heart failed to leap, then to apparently stop, leaving her weak and trembling. If some one said "Mrs. Tressidar" suddenly, she gave a start, all of which, being a comparatively new development, annoyed her greatly. Just now she imagined the Count's voice held something more than mere curiosity and the old fear grasped her.

"I have not seen him lately," the man said, "he seems to be interested in a new deal."

"Yes?"

A "new deal" might be anything—another woman, a horse, stocks, or more whisky. It was characteristic of Leslie that when she trusted a person, suspicion of them never entered her head.

Another woman might have tortured herself, wondering whether this poor, starving, heart-sore girl from India would not try to see the man she loved, and lure him back again, having given no promises nor definite word to the contrary. But Leslie believed in Sue-Leigh Harmon, and thought of her only in womanly pity. If Algy had a new deal and that deal was a woman, it was assuredly not this one.

"But let us speak of lighter topics," continued the Count airily, "shall we drive somewhere to tea?"

Leslie was just about to refuse, when she was summoned to the telephone. At once she knew Algy waited to speak with her, and she trembled.

"Is that you, Littly Lady?"

"Yes, Algy."

"Well, I shall not be home to-night for dinner, nor until late, perhaps. I have met some old friends and we are going to 'do' New York. Will you ask some one over and not be lonely, dear?"

"Algy!"

The man must indeed be selfish who could withstand the disappointment, the appeal in Leslie's voice. As a matter of fact, some twinge of conscience passed fleetingly over Tressidar, and he spoke hastily:

"No, no, dear, not what you think, I swear! We are going to Chinatown and through the Tenderloin, and all that. You can't very well come, but to-morrow I am going to bring these two chaps up for dinner. Is that all right?"

Leslie never quarrelled, she never persisted in having her way, she never nagged. She took it for granted that for a man of Algy's temperament and habits some life outside his home was necessary, and she had never openly discouraged his jaunts. But just at this time every hour he spent away from her was an hour lost, and there were moments when she could hardly keep from telling him of Dr. Graham's visit.

"Are you there?" came the low, pleasant, unruffled voice again.

"Yes, dear. I am awfully disappointed, because I wanted you particularly to-night," she hesitated, but there was silence, "good-by!"

"Good-by, darling. Listen, I am going to send you a kiss. . . . Oh, what a foolish old married man, I am!"

The Count was brilliant all evening, and except for thinking of Algy and wondering what he was doing Leslie almost enjoyed herself. Instead of having tea, they had dinner together, then drove slowly through the park for an hour or two. The Count was supremely happy—he had not been allowed such dangerous intimacy for many months.

"You will repeat this joy to me soon, will you not, *mon amie?*" he said softly, as the door opened to admit Leslie to her home.

"Oh, but yes," she answered, scarcely thinking what she said.

"To-morrow, perhaps?" insinuated the Count eagerly.

"I can't promise," answered Leslie vaguely, "but perhaps. Good night."

"You look ill, Mrs. Tressidar," said the maid, who came in with a tray the following morning. "Have you had a bad night?"

"No, no, thank you, Ellen," Leslie answered, smiling. "Did Mr. Tressidar come home last night?"

"I don't think so, madame."

"Has there been any message for me, Ellen?"

"I don't know of any, Mrs. Tressidar."

"Very well, you may go, and take the tray; I don't feel hungry."

It would be hard to wait until dinner time to see Algy. And then he would bring home two men. What a bother! They would probably smoke and talk until all hours, and perhaps take Algy out with them, after all. Oh, well, it couldn't be helped, only she hoped to feel better than at present.

Margaret Crowley dropped in to lunch, and was shocked at the sight of her friend.

"You look positively ill, Leslie," she said, in her blunt way, "have you seen a physician?"

Leslie bit her lips and laughed.

"To satisfy you, Margaret, I will say that I have had a physician, who told me that I had *nerves,* all in capital letters. Fancy me a prey to nerves. Can you imagine that?"

"Easily. You were always highly nervous, only I don't know of anything in particular which

brought that fact patently before your eyes. Ceciley always said you were nervous."

"Dear old pippin!"

"However, that does not make your eyes so dark, they almost look black, instead of blue or gray. Oh, Leslie, dear, I wonder if you can ever realize how I have loved your beauty all these years."

"Why, Margaret Crowley, you old goose!" cried Leslie tenderly. "I am not beautiful, and no one realizes it better than I. The sad part about it all is, that I am the dreadfully disappointing person who 'goes off,' as our English sisters say. I have to be young to look nice; in middle or old age, I would have looked hideous." She used the "would have" quite unconsciously, and Margaret did not notice. "Now, Vera Stearns will grow old gracefully and prettily, so will you, dear. You will be regal and duchess-y. I have now to resort to all sorts of petty devices to even fool people into thinking I am good-looking. Curl papers, massage, lots of sleep, regular hours for food, et cetera, have preserved me, if you like, but I am not beautiful, my dear."

"We think so, at any rate." The pronoun slipped out inadvertently, but they both noticed, and ignored it. "Some people can't be beautiful, no matter how hard they try. Will you not come to our house and have dinner to-night?" asked Margaret. "It has been so long since you came?"

"There is nothing I should like better," exclaimed Leslie sincerely, "but to-night Algy is

bringing home two old country friends of his, so, of course, I must stay home."

It was on the tip of her tongue to invite Margaret to dine with them, then she thought better of it—it would never do to let Margaret know of Algy's "attack," granting he had one. Leslie Tressidar tried to be sure that her husband would come, but corroding fear ate into her peace of mind, and she was silent.

Soon the visitor left.

Calling the maid, Leslie began to dress, although there was more than an hour before dinner. Even when finished there was still an eternity of heavy minutes ahead, and she walked restlessly up and down in her room. Suddenly she stopped before the cheval mirror and looked intently at the image reflected there.

She saw a slender woman, clad in a white, clinging crepe gown, open at the neck, displaying a rather thin, but beautifully white and shapely, throat; and sloping shoulders from which hung long Japanese-looking sleeves, lined with cloth of silver. Fine silver wire traced a fantastic design on the gown, and a band of cloth of silver made a wide hem effect. Long filagree earrings of the same metal hung against the curve of her neck, and swung gracefully with every move of the head. Leslie's wavy blond hair crowned a broad and serious brow, and it, in turn, was surmounted by a peculiar antique silver tiara.

"The frills are all right," said Leslie whimsically, "but oh, the face!"

She saw a pair of unnaturally large eyes, indescribable in color, shaded by long dark lashes, and further beautified by straight brows. Beneath them were heavy shadows merging their bluish tints into a delicate flush on either cheek. The nose was a little sharp, and had the appearance of being pinched; the mouth quivering even now, as she looked, was the most tender, appealing and at the same time strongest mouth, one could have and yet be human. Still, the drooping lines about the corners gave it the look of sadness, of suffering, which God in his goodness had never intended it should wear. The lips were colorless, and to Leslie's keen eyes there appeared a blueness across them which fascinated her.

She looked at the clock. It was seven-thirty. Simultaneously with the striking of it, a voice called softly:

"Mrs. Tressidar?"

"Yes," answered the woman, turning.

"Shall we wait for Mr. Tressidar?"

"Wait half an hour."

Leslie dined alone, and also on the following night. Then she telephoned Don Crowley.

"My pride is broken, old friend," she told him. "Algy is gone. Do you know where?"

"Yes, I know, dear Leslie, and I have been waiting for some word from you to offer my help. Oh, darling, hear me," he cried, unable to bear the re-

straint longer, "don't struggle any more! Can't you see how futile it is? With all the good intentions in the world, and all the love for you, of which he is capable, *still* there is nothing for *you!* Leslie, I can't bear it, God knows I have tried, but it's no use!" He took her in his strong arms and crushed her wildly to him, burying his lips in her hair.

"Don, Don," cried the girl, struggling, "think what you say—what you do!" She pushed herself from him, and sank trembling in a chair. "You will make me regret sending for you, you will kill our friendship. I can't love any one else," she continued more gently. "Algy Tressidar is my whole life. Can't you understand?"

"I can't, that's the plain truth, I can't! But never mind, if you choose to use me in this way, I take what crumbs fall from your hand humbly, and ask your pardon for forgetting myself just now."

"Oh, Don, I know how selfish I am, and I'm sorry," cried Leslie miserably, "I wish you wouldn't think of me in that way. Can't you stop?"

The man vehemently shook his head.

"Then think of my case—I can't stop, either."

"Ah, but you are worthy of it——" he began, but stopped at the sight of Leslie's deathly whiteness.

An hour or two later she answered the telephone. It was Don, who had found Algy, and, according to Leslie's earnest request, was going to bring him, willy-nilly, home the following night about midnight. "Are you sure you can bring him, Don?"

she asked falteringly. "A great deal depends upon it."

"Your husband will be in the house to-morrow at midnight," answered Crowley decisively.

Leslie hung up the receiver and crossed the room to a cupboard, bringing from it a vivid crimson gown. This she laid upon the back of a chair, then found shoes, stockings, and gloves to match; last, she took the cover off a superb cloak of white satin trimmed elaborately with jet and gold.

With a little indrawn sigh, she seated herself before her dressing table and opened some packages lying on it. They were boxes of actresses' cosmetics.

"The gambler prepares to play his trump card," she said aloud, in a voice husky with tears, and she dipped her white finger into a pot of rouge.

CHAPTER XI.

Half-past eleven struck and Leslie, sitting downstairs in the library, which was almost opposite the front door, shivered. She made two attempts to rise before succeeding, then drew her cloak about her shoulders and crept, shaking, to the front door. Here she paused in an attitude of listening.

Presently there was the sound of voices, and a key was fitted in the lock. As swiftly as her shaking limbs would allow, she ran from the front door into the butler's pantry, and from there into a little side passage, opening on the street. Unlocking the door, she let herself out, and sped through the alleyway, gaining the front entrance, just as a man whom she recognized as Don Crowley walked down the steps into the darkness.

She waited an instant, then went boldly up the steps and rattled the handle of the door.

As Algy opened it and peered unsteadily out, she was leaning against the frame, waving a farewell to some one whose footsteps echoed back to them.

Tressidar moved aside to let her pass, and opened his lips for a word of greeting and apology, when something about his wife caused him to remain silent, in quivering horror. The man was quite un-

strung, as he always was, when he tried to pull himself together, he was burning, suffering for another drink, and had been in the act of going to his cellaret when Leslie rattled the door.

She swept haltingly past him, and leaned against the library door. The darkness made a weird background, the black oak frame of the jamb heightened the startling whiteness of her cloak, and brought out the burnished tints of her hair. Altogether, the setting as alluringly beautiful. *But* the subject!

They stood facing each other, speechless for a moment, then Leslie chuckled, and her eyes wavered unsteadily from her husband's face. They gleamed like stars, and seemed as large as silver dollars. Cheeks and lips were almost as deep a scarlet as the folds of the gown which peeped out from their dazzling covering.

Leslie chuckled, looked around the familiar hallway, and spoke in an unusually loud and strident voice:

"You got home before we did, after all, didn't you?"

She swayed a little, shifted her position on the other foot, and leaned more heavily against the door. Then she giggled again.

"You are a big joke, Algy," the words came slowly, and precisely as though she were afraid of confusing them, "a great big joke."

Tressidar could not speak for watching her. He

discredited his own sobriety as he looked, surely there was some mistake.

"Where have you been," he demanded suddenly, "and with whom?"

Leslie started, and, in passing her hand across her brow, the white mantle slipped from her shoulders to the floor. Tressidar caught his breath; never had he seen anything so maddeningly beautiful as his wife, as she stood mockingly before him. Gowned in flaming red, she looked like a vivid bird of the tropics.

Her neck and bosom were dazzling in contrast, and the brilliants in her hair and around her throat seemed indeed a part of her. But, oh, the other!

"I know what's you think, my hus-band," she said, frowning and speaking more rapidly and carelessly. Then, with a secretive nod, she repeated: "I know."

"Where were you, and with whom?"

"Supper—Sh-Sh-Sherry's—with th' Count," was the defiant answer.

"Oh, my God!"

A foolish giggle broke the silence which followed these words.

"You're a joke, Algy! But you're all right, Kid, an' I like you."

"Stop," Tressidar took a step forward and caught his wife by the wrist, roughly. "You are a woman——"

She interrupted with a delighted laugh.

"Aha, we have discovered one clue—she ish a woman! Good! What nex-ht?"

"You are the one woman in *all* my experience in whom I placed implicit trust. That you were not a gilded saint I well knew, but you were a *woman.* Bah, you are too drunk to even understand me!" He groaned miserably. "Leslie, my wife, what have you done?"

He tried to speak gently, to compel her to look him squarely in the face, but without success. Her wavering glance rested in turn upon each object about them, and all the while her red lips parted in a fatuous smile.

"Leslie!" The cry was quick and sharp.

She blinked her eyes and straightened up for a moment, lifting her chin and showing a beautiful line from the tip of it down her throat and neck.

"Wish t' be called Mrs. Tressidar," she said, with increasing thickness. "I don't know you well enough for such-ch familiarity." Then she laughed, laughed, laughed!

"Leslie!" There was suffering in the cry; it came from Tressidar's soul. "For God's sake stop, and listen to me. This is a deserved punishment, I suppose, though much too great. If you have ever suffered as I am writhing now, may God indeed forgive me, I did not know what I did. Listen!" he cried, again putting two feverish hands upon her gleaming shoulders, "*I swear* by the most sacred thing in life—my love for you, I swear by the God who made me, and the mother who bore me, I swear

by the child who carries my name and yours—*never to touch another drop in all my life!* But neither shall you!"

A sudden change came over Leslie's face as he looked; from it radiated a divine light which puzzled and dazzled him. She stood magnificently straight and slender, and uttered a sobbing cry:

"Algy!"

Then she fell a limp and crumpled mass of crimson chiffon in his arms. For an instant he strained her to him, then, looking intently into the upturned face, he saw something which made him reel with sudden fear.

"Leslie, Little Lady Mine," he called. Even rouge failed to hide the deathly pallor of her face, powder was impotent to cover the blueness about her lips.

"Little Lady, speak to me!"

"Put me down, Algy, quick! Oh, my darling, my darling!"

Algernon Tressidar laid his lifeless burden on the huge white rug which lay at her feet. Then he knelt brokenly beside her—she had played the game to win.

THE END.

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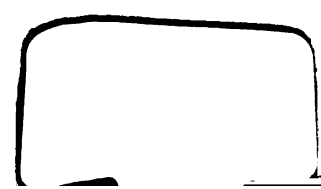
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